

Beyond The Sky

A Fantroll Zine



CREDITS

ALTERNIA

Valyixin (*twitter*)
Chowithdots (*twitter*)
Momostuck (*twitter*)
clockworkreapers (*tumblr*)
robichter (*twitter*)
Cassandra_OOC (*twitter*)
Greaserparty (*twitter*)
F0nkart (*twitter*)
7DaysLuck (*twitter*)
ScottyBJordan (*twitter*)
BrushBanditKC (*twitter*)
Cloverbear (*twitter*)
Kittiebats (*twitter*)
Noxeorn (*twitter*)
Birdysleeps (*twitter*)
Domesticatedpoltergeist (*tumblr*)
OfficialRufioh (*twitter*)
Butlerkitty_ (*twitter*)
tastelesgelatin (*twitter*)
Glassgoblin (*twitter*)
Starry_cosmos (*twitter*)
Logg.jpg (*instagram*)

MUSICIAN

OneSliceOfPi (*twitter*)

p1

p2, 9

p3

p4

p5

p6, 7

p8

p10

p22

p23

p67

p68

p69

p70

p71, 87

p84

p85, 86

p88

p89

p90

p91

p92, 93

p94

FANPLANETS

Acylshomestuckart (*tumblr*)
TsuyoXmr (*twitter*)
Zeldasoft (*twitter*)
HikkaBox (*instagram*)
MikkytheHamster (*twitter*)
CHERIPEPSI (*twitter*)
Ccats900 (*twitter*)
Menenthias (*twitter*)
Ascendant_Leo (*twitter*)
kishactualdoodles (*instagram*)
Roundntalented (*twitter*)
Xianta_art (*twitter*)
Nookdestroyer (*twitter*)
Pi3shark (*twitter*)
Requinade_art (*twitter*)
Bisectro (*twitter*)
PrincePeachu (*twitter*)
Mirth_and_mire (*twitter*)
Melonsharks (*twitter*)

WRITERS

Skyeec2 (*twitter*)
Heirofaorist (*twitter*)
WizardzWiz (*twitter*)

p95

p96

p97

p98

p99

p100, 114

p101

p102, 109

p103

p104

p105

p106

p107, 117

p108

p110

p111

p112

p113

p115

p116

p11

p24

p72



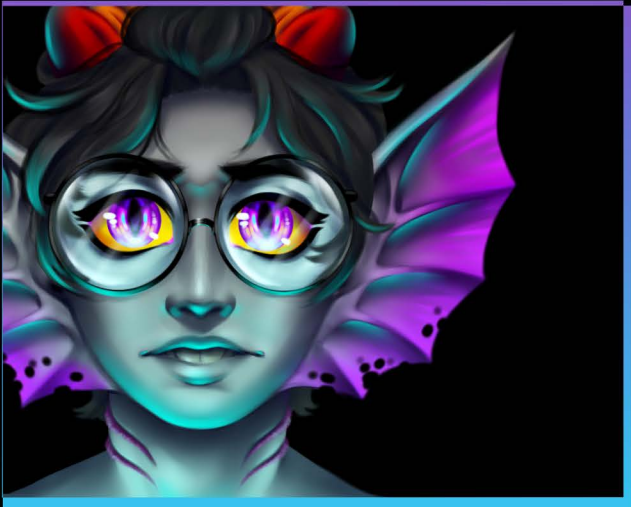
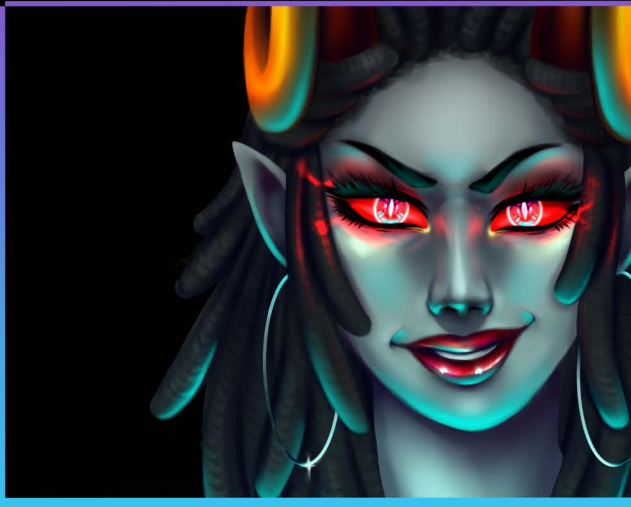
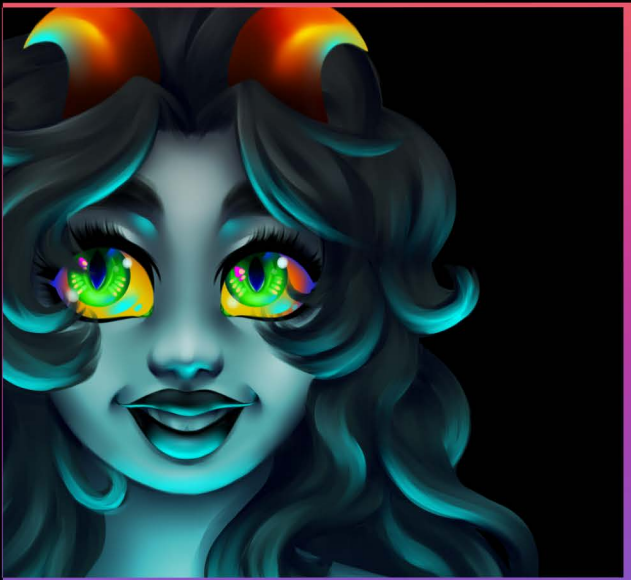
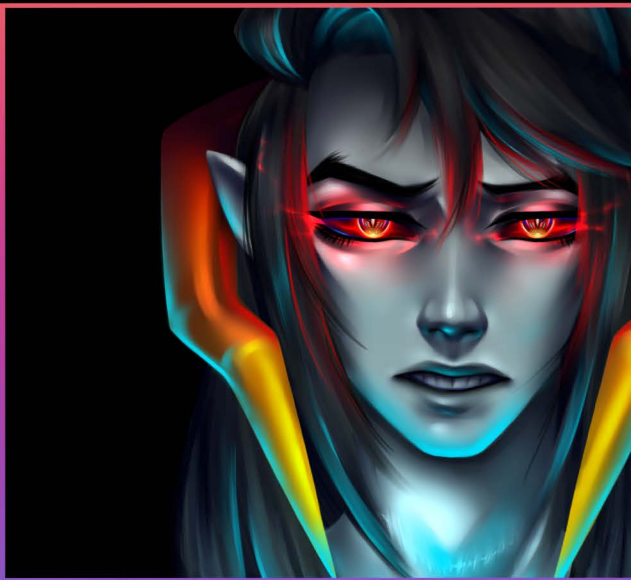
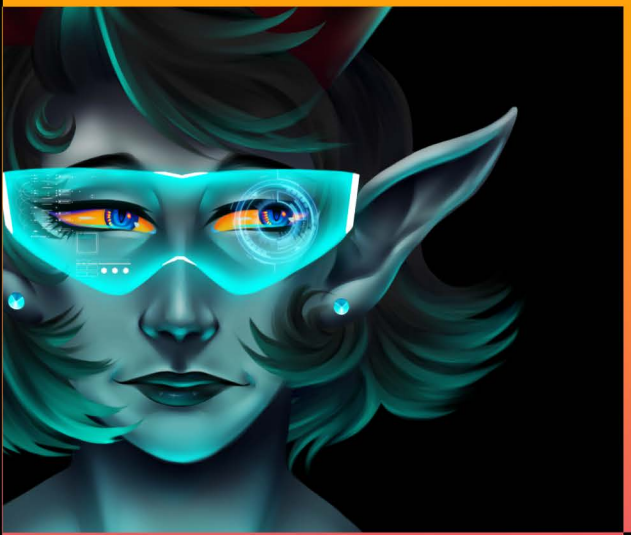
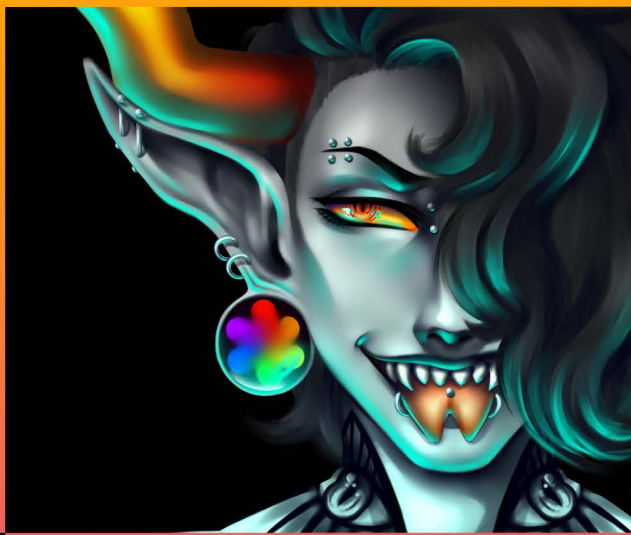
ALTERNIA

S. JXZLHZE

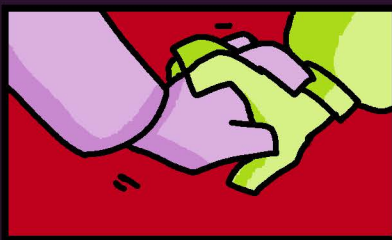
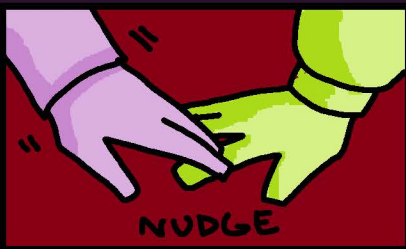




















Gendal Ribdom - The Want To Be An Individual - Skyeec2

“Ok!”

Gendal blinked, the action hidden behind the thick, coloured lenses of his glasses, turning back to face the other purple-blood taking up space within his hive.

“Ok?”

Pavlov was seated upon the communal lounging platform, smile directed down at the hop-beast like lusus that was currently attempting to chew apart the bright colours of his mismatched vest, matching the rest of the clown’s clothing and general appearance; bright, mismatched and colourful to an extreme, a complete opposite from Gendal himself and the appearance of his hive; darker, more respectable and put together.

If not for the shade of purple of his glasses and some of his clothing, it would be easy to assume that they were of different blood castes from the first glance, just how Gendal preferred it.

If the troll Gendal Ribdom could be as separated as possible from the reputation and connotations associated with his blood caste then he would be more than content.

Unfortunately, there were just things that couldn’t be true no matter how much one wanted them to be and for Gendal it was the rest of Alternia’s initial reaction to the purple he wore.

But that was fine enough, easy to deal with and ignore. Just because the rest of the world saw him one way at first didn’t mean he truly was that thing at his core. Something

that was more than obvious when more than a singular moment was taken to look him over or interact with him in any way, or so he felt.

"I think!" Gendal blinked, forcing himself back to the conversation at hand and the troll seated on his communal lounging platform from the distraction he'd allowed himself around the safest and least cull-thirsty of his blood caste. Pavlov was still petting his lusus, painted nails digging into soft fur, head tilted as he thought through whatever was running through his head. "That as long as you think you're happy with what you're doing then I'm happy for you!"

It was said in Pavlov's usual tone of bright, cheery obliviousness, the troll making it more than apparent how little he actually understood what Gendal had just gotten through explaining to him. In great, minute detail.

The clown continued to prove himself to be a wonderful conversation partner.

At least he was proving to be more reasonable about this than the others would have been should he have told them, small mercies Gendal supposed. At least Pavlov wasn't likely to knock him out and drag him back to Church, a best-case scenario if he had spoken to anyone else but this particular clown in question.

"Thank you," Gendal decided on, watching Pavlov closely from behind dark coloured lenses as the troll grinned brightly at him, baring his underbite and singular golden tooth. "I am... glad to hear you say so. Thank you for listening to me."

"You're always welcome!" Pavlov returned to focusing down at the lusus in his lap, starting to hum a tune that Gendal was all too familiar with from growing up within the doctrine of the Church.

A hymn. Something to take comfort and refuge in. Something to remind them all that they were far above the rest of Alternia's colours for the sheer fact that they could lean on each other for support when they needed it.

A connection Gendal was wilfully casting aside for something completely new and different from what the Church represented and stood for, everything he'd been schooled on.

The chance to exist as wholly himself, an individual, a singular creature without the Church dictating what he could and could not be. Someone that was him and no one else.

"You know the others aren't going to be very happy about this... don't you?" Gendal lifted his gaze from his blind inspection of the floor back to Pavlov, noticing that the other purple had stopped looking back to him for the first time that night. Pavlov's voice was pitched softer, quieter, aimed towards the rest of the hive and reaching Gendal's ears as a product of him being close enough to hear it instead of addressing him directly. "This isn't really... something that ever happens. Usually the only way to get out of the Church is to be thrown out and..."

And they were both more than aware of what happened to those that were thrown out.

"I am more than aware, yes," Gendal sighed heavily, slumping against the wall at his back, head tilting backwards until he was facing the ceiling over their heads, eyes unfocused and looking at absolutely nothing. "It is just something I will have to deal with further down the tracks."

There's a stiff, heavy silence for a few moments afterwards and Gendal drops his head forward to return his attention to Pavlov. The clown was staring intently at the floor in front of him, hands halted on the lusus' fur, teeth biting into his upper lip and dyed brows drawn into a tight furrow.

He waits for the other to work up to being ready to continue, as patient as he could make himself be.

"I hope," he feels himself stiffen at the unnatural hesitance of the clown's voice, tension filling his entire form and breath stopping in his lungs. "That they aren't too unkind to you, when they do find out about all of this."

"You are going to distance yourself from this then." A statement, ringing hollow in its finality.

Silence. Expected but no less disappointing in its reality.

"I see then."

Pavlov snapped towards him, though his eyes remained focused anywhere but at Gendal's face. "Don't be like that now!" He was pleading with him now, trying to get Gendal to see and accept his side of the situation. "You really can't expect—"

"You are right." He cut the other troll off before the excuse could be given voice and substance. "I really could not expect you to stand by me after this, regardless of our prior history with each other." Really he shouldn't have expected anything other than

that, clowns stuck together after all, wasn't that the most obvious thing he was leaving behind by permanently removing the paint from his skin?

Of course Pavlov wouldn't stay. He wouldn't risk ostracizing himself from the rest of the Church, not when he had the rest of his life ahead of him and nothing to gain from doing so.

Gendal understood why Pavlov would choose to cast their friendship aside and leave him to his fate, but that didn't mean he was pleased with the other troll's decision all the same.

Gendal turned his face away from the frown his former friend was giving him. "I would appreciate it if you were to leave now."

"Gendal—"

"Please. I have things I need to prepare for and you should get back before they start to miss you."

Endings were best completed as quickly as possible, no need to linger on things that had already been decided upon.

It wouldn't do either of them any good.

~

One seven-night cycle.

That's all Gendal had before one of them came looking for him.

Honestly it was longer than he'd been expecting. Perhaps Pavlov hadn't immediately told the rest of the Church his decision? He could only guess.

Unfortunately there wasn't anything that could stop the Church from discovering his choice and sending someone in to check in on him. Which was how he found himself stopped by a most unwelcome presence on his way home from rehearsals one night, close enough to dawn to be considered a bit on the risky side to not be planning on heading inside.

Gendal wished that it was anyone but the clown standing in front of him, grinning at him with its wild and unkempt appearance, closer to feral than he'd ever imagined a troll being able to be.

Really, if The Sweet Sister had to have sent someone after him, why couldn't it have been anyone else? Someone that wasn't prone to random, meaningless culling at the very least.

But no, instead she'd sent *them*. Just lovely.

Exactly what he needed in his life.

And of course they had to make themselves known by dropping down from somewhere above Gendal's head and planting a foot into his chest to send him falling to the ground, standing on his chest once they landed and grinning down at him with their sharp teeth bared in a wicked, manic grin.

"Now what a we got here?" The words were a mix between a cooing purr and a rumbling growl, rough and dangerous to his ears. The clown was staring straight down at Gendal, watching him with amused eyes as he struggled in vain under their foot, lips pulled back to show off far too many of their teeth. "Sweet little motherfuckin sheep gone and got himself piper'd 'way from being a right proper respectable motherfuckin part of the flock. Motherfuckers been culled fa less, ya know?"

"Get... off of me," Gendal gasped out, hands wrapped around the clown's ankle in an attempt to dislodge it from where they were crushing his ribs.

The clown just ignored his rasping command, rolling their eyes as they pressed their foot down harder onto the centre of Gendal's chest. "Ain't real thinkin ya be deservin it, little black sheep."

He gasped under the increase in pressure, sure he felt something crack within the hollow of his chest, and dug his own artificially rounded nails into their skin. He kept his eyes open though they were still obscured from the clown's view, knowing better than to even dare to take them off of the clown over him for a second.

Temivo Naspio had earned their place amongst The Sweet Sister's favour after all, unfailingly ruthless in their actions and driven in completing whatever task she set out for them in the name of the Church. Temivo was more than a simple danger. Even to those higher than them on the hemospectrum.

"Get off—"

"Alright"

Gendal barely has a moment to prepare before Temivo is moving, lifting their foot from his chest and allowing him to drag an easy breath into his lungs, a breath he chokes upon in his body's eagerness to take the air into his lungs. He turns on the ground, getting his knees under him as he coughs and wheezes on the air he'd been so wanting.

A foolish thing he was already trying to rectify. He needed to turn his eyes back to Temivo to ensure that they didn't do anything without him preparing for it.

It took more time than he wanted to admit it did, but he was finally able to calm his lungs enough to focus back on Temivo, the clown rolling their eyes at him once they saw that they had his attention again, mouth twisted in something between a smile and a grimace.

"Little lost sheep ain't even able ta play with the big clowns now?" They mocked, snapping their teeth and rolling their shoulders, horns tossing in a display of power and posturing. "Lookit you fallin without us ta be lookin' out for ya."

"Only because of your own efforts," Gendal grit out, close to snapping back at the other purple if doing so wouldn't have ended up as a death sentence for him.

Temivo seemed to catch it though, of course they did. A laughsassin in training, there was no way they'd something like that.

"Little black sheep rearing for a fight?" They chuckled, one of their claws reaching behind their head and long strands of messy, wild hair to pull a singular club from their back, solid and permanently stained every colour of the hemospectrum. "Don't worry none, I'll send ya crawling back to the Messiahs in pieces."

"You will never get me to go back to being one of the 'flock'," Gendal snapped, glaring at Temivo through the lens of his glasses. He'd had enough of living as a part of a collective unit, he much rather this individual existence now that he knew he was allowed it. "Leave me alone before I force you too."

"Little black sheep gotta be out ya mind if ya think imma listen ta anything said by some blasphemous motherfucker." Temivo scoffed, hands splaying out to either side of them, one open and empty, the other still clutching the bloody club like the most natural thing in the world. Then their face dropped from its mocking smile, a snarl twisting their lips and showing off more of the fangs in their mouth. Their empty hand moved to rest on

their hip while the one holding the club lifted to rest on their shoulder. “Disgusting, blasphemous motherfucker thinkin ya got a right ta be talkin at ya better.”

Gendal stood, limbs finally steady enough to do so as the last of his patience was used. “That is enough. You need to leave. Immediately.”

Another scoff, a dismissive toss of Temivo’s horns. “Or what? Ya gonna sing a pretty little dismissal at me, little black sheep?”

“Or I will ensure that whatever you do is experienced tenfold by your little doll.”

It’s a threat they both understand, Temivo’s decisions and actions directly tied to the continued well-being of their chained puppet.

But Temivo didn’t respond like he wanted them to.

A grin stretches across the clown’s face, wild and manic and showing off far too many teeth for his liking. There’s a fire in their eyes, burning bright with building Chucklevoodoos.

“Looks like there’s hope for ya yet little black sheep!” He’s unsure how exactly they managed to speak with each of their teeth at once but the feat is accomplished, nonetheless. “Don’t ya worry none, you’ll be back where ya supposed ta be soon ‘nough. The Sweet Sister’ll be pleased ta hear that.”

He freezes, limbs and muscles locking as Temivo cackled like some wild laughing-barkbeast before disappearing as quickly as they appeared..

That hadn’t been his intention at all. How had they even come to that conclusion?

Gendal stared at the point Temivo had disappeared from, took a deep breath and turned away from it to continue on his way home. He wouldn’t tell the others about what had happened to him tonight, there was no need to unnecessarily worry them, after all.

He needed to meet with The Sweet Sister before he told them anything.

~

He puts it off for a number of days, feeling eyes on him wherever he went though he wasn’t able to locate where exactly they were originating or who exactly was watching him so closely and so frequently throughout the night. But he can’t put off the meeting

for too long, not if he doesn't want The Sweet Sister to grow impatient and send someone to retrieve him for a discussion.

Or the more likely scenario of someone else growing impatient with her disregard and apathy regarding the situation and forces her hand themselves.

Either way, Gendal found himself walking the familiar path to Church before the seven-night cycle ended.

The moons were high in the sky, brightly illuminating the night and the forest around him as he travelled along the road, the trees around him large and wild, twisting and turning together in an endless web of branches and trunks. Gendal kept his face turned forward, eyes focused on the path he was taking and not anyone that may or may not have been lingering in the surrounding trees.

He was there for one thing and one thing only, getting side-tracked was not something he would allow to occur.

He wanted to be in and out as quickly as he could, entertaining anyone else was part of his plan for the evening.

The forest opened up suddenly to the Church grounds and it looked as it always had during his younger years, a chaotic, senseless mess of bright colours and hives that didn't make sense, tents pitched everywhere and blood staining the grounds in an array of dark colours. But where once there would have been a feeling of welcoming, of being accepted and tangled into the fold by the voodooos of the clowns within, now Gendal was overwhelmed by the sensation of *threat* , *danger* , *unwanted* . It was enough to make him pause, stumble in his step and breath deep to push through it and continue, steps a bit slower and more cautious now that he was treading amongst the tents of the Clown Church.

No one stopped or waylaid him on his journey to the central most tent, though he passed a number of clowns, each painted in white and deep grey to show their devotion to the Messiahs and their connection to each other. It was a terrifying experience, knowing that all of these trolls were against him in a unified front simply due to him not being one of them.

The tent was open and ready for him to step into, the flap of it falling shut as the Chucklevoodooos that had been scratching at his spine and the back of his neck cut off, leaving him off kilter in their sudden absence.

"There you are little lamb."

Tancol was seated at the other end of the tent, hands folded upon her lap as she waited for him to take the seat before her, the tiny table between them covered by a cloth of purple embroidered with gold and holding a glass sphere holding a swirling, milky lavender mist within it.

He chooses not to respond to her words and sees her head shift ever so slightly, an ear twitching under her curving horns to pick up the sound of his shoes on the carpet to follow his approach.

"Are you not speaking to me today, little lamb?" Then I believe you may find some difficulty in communing." She continues with a chuckle, low and almost echoing in the tent around them both.

"I would appreciate if you would not call me that," she smiled as he broke his silence, fangs gleaming in the low torchlight illuminating the tent. "I am not one of your flock anymore, remember?"

"Nonsense," she waves away his words, not caring to hear them or him. "You will always be one of ours, no matter if you choose to be rid of your paint for a time."

Gendal's brow furrowed and he came to a stop next to the chair she had set up and waiting for him, staring at the half of her face that isn't covered by the sweeping hair of her fringe. "But I do not *wish* to be. That is the *point* of all of this; why you had Temivo attack me a few nights prior."

"They do as they wish," his jaw clenched at the denial, Tancol sweeping the accusation and blame away from herself and back onto Temivo, like the clown was able to make any decision truly their own within the Church. "You cannot expect me to control their every waking thought and decision now, can you? They are free to decide and do as they wish, as are all of us, as are you."

"Then why are you so—"

"You are free to play around with your little hate friends until the harshwhimsies draw you away from your silly little distractions and back into the flock." She continued, volume and tone as level and sweet as it had been the rest of the interaction, not needing to do anything to overpower him. "Even that hornless cull-bait of yours," his pumper freezes, clenches tight in his chest. "If that's what you so desire. The Messiahs

have already spoken of your return, we can be patient.” How had she known about that? He hadn’t told anyone about—

Pavlov.

“Did you pry that out of him or did he tell you willingly? His jaw was clenched tight, teeth grinding together as he forces the words out from between them, hands fisted at his side.

Tancol continued to smile at him, peaceful and serene and unconcerned with his growing anger. “It hardly matters how I know, only that I do. But do not worry over things that do not concern you,” she waved her hand again, the swirling mist within the crystal ball in front of her, noticeably following the motion. “She will be dead soon, our intervention or no. You don’t really think they’ll let something like that through the Trails do you?”

No. But that didn’t mean he wasn’t deluding himself otherwise.

“I want you to stop sending your clowns to bother me and mine.” He switched back to the reason behind his presence there to begin with, Tancol having already distracted him too much from his original purpose there. It was only supposed to be a quick meeting; get in, state his piece and then leave to resume his own life away from her and the string of the Church. It was that simple.

But she had to change that, of course she did.

“Now little lamb,” she chuckled again, the hair of her fringe shifting with the motion enough to show off one of the stitches hidden beneath it, stark, vivid purple against the white of her painted face. Gendal felt his hackles rise, something wispy and freezing gripping the back of his neck, holding him in place and preventing him from moving no matter how much he screamed at himself to do something *anything* .

“I told you that I don’t control the choices of anyone here, don’t you remember?”



וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל



וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל



7DAYS LUCK
2020

Marriage à-la-mode étranger

Written by homericHorror

Edited by homericHorror, and sonefire

Featuring trolls by homericHorror, sonefire, and magicalyams

*It was on a day, one such as this,
Where the woods blocked the sun above,
And two trolls, hands clasped together,
Joined in union of their love.*

*For bells do ring, and chime and sing,
And sound out with mirthful joy,
But is this all that it seems on this, this day of rings,
are some in fact, scheming ploys?*

*Confusion and turmoil, amidst strange thoughts
Heartbreak, love, and loss,
and the pain that death has wrought?
And one who hatred in their heart was not all that was embossed?*

*Yea join us here, on this day of joy
As all will be revealed,
And two souls are joined as one,
And see that which is broken be healed.*

(Special thanks to my darling girlfriend Sonefire for the intro poem, all her help writing and editing this piece, and also for creating Mistrl and Lolech, and my wonderful friend Yams (magicalyams on tumblr) for making Asplec and inventing the terms “junior hatemates” and “sourpitch kids.”)

Part 1: The Left Behind

It was not customary for grey-skinned bug-adjacent aliens to wear a wedding dress and especially not customary for them to be awake in the middle of the day, yet Calart Emisto was doing both, and thoroughly enjoying it. The troll regarded herself in the mirror in her respiteblock, a gentle smile and olive lipstick on her lips. She ran her hands over the soft ruffles of the skirt, and a giant plush bow around her waist. She fought the urge to spin, knowing that the bustled train would probably knock something over. It felt odd to her to be wearing something like this. She hadn't worn anything this colourful before, especially not in a stark, Lusugian white. She hadn't worn anything like this before, if she was being honest. She'd spent most of her life in simple clothes, and everything after her 6th wriggling day was spent in camo.

This was not because she liked wearing olive camo in a forest of pink trees, far from it. Lowbloods are prepared for their jobs from a young age, even in the way they're supposed to dress. When your destined job is invariably 'Cannon fodder for the empire's endless spacewar,'. Out of sight, out of mind. Both of your impending doom, and any flashy highbloods who might look to put you back in your lowly place. Not that many could afford something nice anyways; You picked and outfit and stuck with it. An entire wardrobe of the same thing. Every day. Until you crumble to nothing, dead in the vacuum of space, with no need to wear anything.

Calart looked up at the clock. Less than an hour left. Her heart was pounding in her ears. She hated being this anxious, even if it was in preparation for something she wanted. Desperate for something to distract herself with, she suddenly shot up.

“Gotta rehearse my... What did Pheido call ‘em? Vows? Yeah, that’s it. Gotta rehearse those!” Calart muttered to herself.

She began the annoying process of procuring her vow notes from her sylladex by pulling her crossbow from her strife specibus, and taking aim at the target which her ‘Target Modus’ produced. Hitting a perfect bullseye, she ditched the crossbow, and started pacing. She flipped through the sheets of notes, chewing the inside of her cheek. She tried her best to focus, to learn these carefully created and curated lines off by pusher, but it just wasn’t sticking. They were... Forced.

The entire thing was forced. A ‘wedding.’ An event completely unknown to Troll culture, cobbled together from the half-hearted explanations of two humans she’d been forced to interact with, and her friend Pheido’s earnest attempts to cobble together the rest from the marriage rituals of 30 different aliens. It was meant to be a representation of commitment and love.

But... how could that matter to a girl whose partner would live 100 times longer than she ever could? What would it matter to him? What do grand gestures of love mean in a world where her life could end because some Highblood thought she looked at them wrong? It was a mess, it was stupid, and a mistake, and she should just- Calart let out a beleaguered groan and chucked the notes, putting her face into her hands.

She was tired, and stressed, but she did want to do this... and maybe not the entire thing was forced, she admitted to herself. She did love the Troll she was going to marry. She loved him so much. He was lovely to her, and he was a handsome fellow. Sharp as anything sometimes, dull as a rock at others. Couldn’t tie a tie, but she’d never heard someone pontificate about niche battle strategy for an hour before. She loved his rambling, and his goofy teeth, and his odd way of talking, and the way every emotion he felt changed his voice and face in a distinct way. She was so flushed for him and yet...

This 'love' wasn't the kind of love she wanted. No matter how much she loved Marrom, it wasn't it. She'd considered maybe it was a vacillating relationship she was looking for, but not only was Marrom not interested... It just wasn't 'it.' What the 'it' she was looking for was actually closer to how she felt for her Lusus, but not actually the same. It was a safety, a security; an unspoken trust, and feeling of protective, non-conciliatory, non-concupiscent affection she both mourned and struggled to equate to anything else.

How a Troll, a species whose young were split permanently from their adults, got the idea of parental love into her head was a case just as peculiar as her being awake during the day. Trying desperately not to think about the events that brought her to missing this type of love she didn't even have a name for, she couldn't stop herself from looking slowly over to her recuperacoon.

She wrung her hands restlessly. She screwed her eyes shut, trying to stop herself from unearthing what was stored under it. She couldn't. She shoved her recuperacoon out of the way, and reached into the hollow underneath it. She held in her hands, as gently as if it would shatter under a particularly hard breath, a picture of her and a huge violet blooded adult troll. "Poppop..." She muttered, stroking the man's face with her thumb.

As odd as wearing a white dress and being awake during the day was Calarts attachment to, of all things, an adult Troll, and a long dead one at that. She knew, as all Trolls did, that adult Trolls were supposed to be horrifying monsters with only murder on their minds. She'd had it schoolfed into her from a young age... But she knew this one was different. He was kind and gentle, he was funny and wise. He'd stuck around on Alternia, risking death every day, to keep his one of a kind Lusus safe. He'd looked after her when her Hootmom got sick, and risked his life to get medicine when she herself got sick. And that'd been the death of him. She still

remembered it vividly, the roaring flames burning a permanent, pitch black scar into her beautiful forest. The cave where he stayed with his Lusur filled with flame, and a pair of bodies she had never dared to retrieve or even see.

She survived that illness, thanks to Granpa Poppop risking his life. She even survived that culling, thanks to him warning her, but surviving doesn't mean you didn't get hurt. It doesn't mean you aren't left with a scar. A permanent fear of culling, a permanent fear of even daring to toe the line. A need to please, a need to see people happy. A fear of being anything other than the Empire's perfect ideal Olive. That's the damage she took on that day, a hole straight through her heart, and the loss of a love she never quite understood.

Calart looked up from the photo in her hands. She hadn't realised she'd moved. From where she was slumped against a wall she looked slowly up at the clock on the opposite wall. Huh, she thought, it's 4 a.m. She went back to looking at the picture through tired, half lidded eyes, stroking it fondly. Then her eyes snapped wide, and she stood up with a start. "FUCK! I'M GETTING MARRIED NOW!" Quickly rushing to put the picture away and slide her recuperacoon back, Calart rushed about in a panic. She got the very last touches of her outfit done, made sure her hair was fine, made sure her dress was all ready.

"Callie...? You are a little late and I was waiting for you in your loungeblock, but I did not want to bother you and-" The half frantic voice of Ariath Adnena and her fancy cerulean hat peeking through the doorway into Calart's room gave her such a shock that Calart almost screamed. Holding her chest and trying to calm down, she turned around to Ariath and gave her a shaky thumbs up and an awkward smile.

"I-I'm good... I... Only feel like I'm gonna kinda die."

“Oh. That is not ideal, I will admit. Do you want to call this off or...?”

“No! No, definitely not. Why ever would I want to call this off?! All we’re doing is an illegal alien courtship ritual, in the middle of the day, while I’m wearing a dress worth more than I am. We’ve got a mutant, a limeblood, and a MUTANT LIMEBLOOD, the last two of whom are dating, and you know I’m terrified of drones on a good day.” Calart said, going back to pacing hard enough to dig a ditch into her floor. Ariath sighed and made her way over, tutting and shaking her head.

She wasn’t much one for the whole ‘kindness and compassion’ thing, what with her having a reputation to uphold. Yet despite that the fact of the matter was that Calart was her oldest friend. It was different. There’s no facade needed as she hugged Calart tightly. Ariath put her hands on the girl’s cheeks, squishing them like East Alternian Rice-cream balls.

“You are going to be fine. We are all going to be fine. Go out there and be disgustingly mushy and flushed for your matesprit already. He actually managed to tie his tie for once, do *not* let such monumental effort go to waste.” Ariath said, finally letting go of Calart’s face. She slipped behind her and started pushing, properly hard. “Gooooooo!”

Calart couldn’t help but laugh, nearly tripping over her feet. She swatted at Ariath and straightened up. She smoothed out her dress one last time.

“How do I look?”

“Like a dream. Now goooooooooo! Your lusus is waiting!”

Calart, now unable to stop giggling, waved a hand dismissively at her friend. She took a deep, slow breath and stepped out into the sunlight of the day, the burning Alternian sun dappled by the thick canopy overhead.

She looked up and saw, gathered before her, everyone she loved and cared about. Beautiful decorations all over the place, strung between trees and over seats. Cannons at either side of the altar for the dodging of grains at the end. Her closest friends dressed to the nines and sitting, smiling at each other and her.. Even her lusus was dressed up, covered in a beautiful set of armour. After mounting her hooting cholerbear lusus side-saddle, her gaze drifted to the troll standing at the altar, and looked like she'd woken from a stupor. Little tears sprung to the corners of her eyes, and a soft gasp escaped her as she saw Marrom, her darling Matesprit, standing at the altar, grinning ear to ear. She grinned and spoke, loud enough for everyone to hear.

“Holy shit I’m gonna get human married.”

Part 2: The Variables

[Hours ago, but only two.]

“She’s takin’ a while.”

“Shush. Those human dresses look very complex. I am hardly surprised that it is taking her a little while to get ready! Besides, she is likely quite nervous. Not everyone can be as unflappable as yours truly.”

“Mm, you’re definitely flappable, cuz you’re drivin’ me batty.”

“Batty? I thought highblood terms were too “bougie” for you?”

“I’ve spent so much of my time arguin’ with you, I’m surprised your dumb blueblood vocab hadn’t infected me before now.”

Ariath Adnena, a cerulean blooded troll, smirked up at her Kismesis as they folded their arms and turned to look off into the nearby forest. She was laying with her head in her Kismesis’ lap, along a “pew.” It was an odd and uncomfortable wooden bench that Calart said was a necessary part of this esoteric procedure that is a “human wedding.”

Then again, Ariath had mused earlier that day, Calart had said the same about the barely restrained carnivorous Flushed Flora that adorned the seats and threatened to eat her face at any moment. So Ariath was not entirely certain about the veracity of that claim. Turning back from staring at some of Alternia’s hell-flora, her face was suddenly seized by an evil grin. She would now cause problems on purpose.

“Asplec, dear~?” Ariath said, her voice saccharine sweet.

“Cursed. Awful. Don’t call me that.... What?” Asplec Oronis said, their face instantly contorting into a grimace at Ariath’s words, locking eyes with their Kismesis’ one eye not covered by their hair.

“Why are you wearing a blood splattered lab coat at my best friend’s Human Wedding?”

“I’m wearing a suit under it. The coat’s comfy, and you sprung this dumb event on me like... Yesterday.”

“Firstly, it is the principle of the thing Asplec. Second, I got this *wonderful event* we are attending for our incredibly close friend sprung on me yesterday too, and I look like a million caegars.”

“She’s *your* close friend. I barely know Calart. Her vibes are weird. Too nice. Also, absolutely, I have to agree with you on the million caegars point.”

Flushing slightly from the rare compliment, Ariath looked up at her kismesis. “Is that right?” She said, a shit-eating grin slowly forming on her face.

Asplec locked eyes with her again, completely deadpan. “Mhm. Completely obsolete and about a thousand sweeps old.”

“Oh bite me, Asplec!” She snapped, rolling her eye and crossing her arms. “The! Point! Is! You cannot be traipsing around here in your murdergarments. Not only because it looks trashy, but I really think it is setting off the flushed flora. Also you are wearing a shirt and a tie. That is *not* the same as a suit.”

“It’s practically the same thing, please do not engage in this needless pedantry.”

“I will engage in exactly as much pedantry as I wish; It is my right as a Blueblood! We’re the last caste who gets to engage in endearing pedantry.”

“‘sthat right?”

“You have had Marrom engage you in a pedant’s trap before, have you not?”

Asplec grimaced and nodded. “Fair. Either way though, I don’t own a fuckin’ suit and I can’t buy one in the few hours you gave me. It takes me longer than that to get to town.”

“You should’ve asked me to pick one up for you.”

“As if I’d either give you the satisfaction or risk the horrific getup you’d try to shove me into.”

“Rude. You could’ve at least bought one online.”

“I’m flat fuckin’ broke Ari. Sue me.”

“Oh I’ve been waiting on just that invitation! I know exactly where to get some pro-bono legal advice in that case!” Ariath bolted upright, nearly smacking Asplec in the chin with her forehead. She turned to where the couple’s Teal friend, Pheido, was chatting animatedly with their Matesprit. She opened her mouth and started to call out their name, before Asplec panickedly clamped a hand over it.

“Fuckin’ hell!” They said as they dragged their other hand down their face, and let out a beleaguered sigh. “Alright, no need to get trollcop involved, okay?”

Ariath ran her tongue along her Kismesis’ hand, smirking from ear to ear as they recoiled, quickly wiping their hand clean. She cackled and raised her own hand to their face, giving their cheek a few quick pats. She laid back down with her head in Asplec’s lap, still cackling. “Hehehehe! You’re just soooooooooo easy to tease Aspy. I wouldn’t be nearly this bad if you were just a tad more stoic.”

“If I were any more stoic I’d turn to stone.” They said, glaring down at their infuriating partner, who was still in fits laughing at them. The pair of them froze as a shadow passed over them. Looking up, Pheido and their Matesprit stood over the comfortable pair.

“Hail and well met, wigglers!” The exhausted looking Tealblood said as they looked down at the pair of younger trolls. They tilted their head to the side, narrowing their eyes at Ariath and Asplec, and the corner of their mouth tugged into a half smile. “You two look comfy there. With all this cuddlin’ and cheek patting, you’d think the sour pitch kids were pale, wouldn’t ya Lolly?” They said, jabbing their matesprit with an elbow. Ariath’s uncovered eye twitched at the teasing, and her face contorted in a scowl. Only Asplec giving her hand a squeeze stopped her from lashing back. The towering Purpleblood chuckled and ruffled her matesprit’s hair, rolling her eyes.

“No need to tease them, Pheido.” She said, then turned to look at the junior hatemates. She offered a toothy smile and an apologetic smile. “Pheido’s not used to pulling all lighters, so they’re being mean. Just ignore them. Way I see it, the two of you are sweet regardless of what quad-”

“STOP!” Ariath’s voice rang out through the shaded clearing, her EYESIGHT INFINIFOLD flaring up underneath the curtain of hair that hides

it, gripping the minds of the three other trolls with a Cerulean haze. “WE ARE PITCH! WE ARE ONLY A SINGLE SWEEP YOUNGER THAN YOU! STOP FUCKING PATRONISING US! I AM JUST HAVING A NORMAL! PITCH! RELATIONSHIP!” Her breathing and hands were shaking from the adrenaline that outburst had sent through her.

She looked frantically from Pheido to Asplec, their eyes glowing blue and staring half-lidded at her, but Lolech wasn't affected at all. Lolech opened her mouth to speak, reaching out a hand to her friend, but Ariath was overcome with complete panic. She released their minds from her hold, and ran. She disappeared past the trees at the edge of the clearing as the two came to their senses. Asplec, the soonest to recover, glared at Pheido and Lolech.

“Assholes.” They spat, glowering at the two older trolls, then ran off after their partner.

Pheido frowned and looked up at Lolech. They forced a small smile and shrugged. “Kids, eh?”

Lolech sighed and watched the pair disappear further into the forest.
“Yeah... Kids...”

If she were forced to be entirely honest about it, which she rarely was about anything, Ariath would have to admit that the whole idea of running off into the forest was an overly dramatic, and wildly terrible idea. The forest in the night time was dark, foreboding, and horrifically dangerous... But at least she knew that. She knew how to handle places that wanted to eviscerate her, but now she sat in the middle of a forest, bright daytime light seeping in through the leaves just enough to be horribly uncomfortable, but not dangerous enough to get her to move on. In this light, where she could see

too well, the forest was quiet, empty, and expansive. She felt swallowed up by the vastness of it, like a grain of sand on a beach.

She changed from sitting, hugging her knees, to laying splayed out on the ground. She let out a heavy sigh, tossing and turning restlessly.

“Hhrrrghgh...” She muttered, making no noise in particular, instead mixing together every exasperated groan she could. She knew that there’d be embarrassment to pay for that outburst of hers. That’s what always happened.

Any time she couldn’t hold it all in behind a boundary of dry wit, any time she wanted to get mad, or sad, she would be mocked and poked at by her friends. “*Just a wiggler tantrum,*” or “*Someone needs a nap.*” She *hated* it. She was barely a sweep younger, and everyone, save for Calart, treated her like a wiggler, no matter how nice they typically were. It was like the chance to jab at her for having emotions was too sweet to pass up for all the worthless cringers in her excuse for a social circle.

She jumped to her feet and began pacing, fiddling with her hands. She paced like this, not able to get her thoughts together, for a few minutes before making another frustrated noise and flopping onto the grass again. She laid her arms over her face and just screamed. She yelled, and hollered, and screamed until her throat was raw... It’s not like she hadn’t brought it on herself anyway. She had made a triple error. She’d dared to be seen with her kismesis, which always drew mockery, and abhorrent nicknames like “*Sour Pitch Kids*” and “*Junior Hatemates,*” she had gotten comfortable and had let down that haughty front she used to soften the sling and arrows of traditional Alternian emotional turmoil, another case of pretty much begging for someone to pick on her for “smiling for once,” and worst of all...

Well, she had gotten comfortable with Asplec. Of all the social crimes she could have committed to invite a day’s worth of external and internal

turmoil, she just had to commit the worst one. She dared to let those feelings she'd desperately held back slip through, and-

She was knocked out of her emotionally self-flagellating spiral when a set of murdergarments floated down lazily onto her face. Spluttering and flailing she sat up, throwing the jacket to the side. She scowled at its owner, Asplec, who threw themselves down onto the ground beside Ariath. She didn't dare look at them, hugging her knees and curling in on herself. She didn't want to hear them mocking her too. This is exactly why Ariath was so surprised when the murdergarments were placed gently over her shoulders, and Asplec put their arm around her. She looked over, sniffled louder, and just scowled at them.

"Here to rub it in? Or are you planning to wax pale and complain that *you* weren't the one who got to mock the fact that I vacillate? Maybe lecture me about my outbursts? Should I be '*above all that*' and '*not let her get to me*' maybe? I'm sure it was '*just a joke*' right?" She looked away again with a scoff.

Ariath was getting worked up again, talking faster and faster as her claws dug into the ground, dragging furrows into it. Asplec, arm still around her, hugged her tighter and rested their head against hers. Her entire body began to slacken at the gentle touch.

"I don't do that shit. You know that. I only rib ya over shit that *doesn't* matter." They wrapped another arm around her, and Ariath curled up into their touch. "I'm not here to mock you..."

"I am sensing a 'but' here..."

"But, *I am* gonna repeat Lolech's drivel *without* the patronising tone. It doesn't matter what our relationship is. We've been livin' a vacillating relationship for a sweep or two now, and if you think I or anyone we know

thinks otherwise, you're vastly overestimat' your own discretion. If I had issues, I would've said so by now. I repeat, it's been nearly two sweeps."

"That is just the problem! I would love to think that was the end of it. I would love to ignore everyone else and just live my life... But I am a *Cerulean*. All we have is a precarious social status based on committing horrendous acts against our fellow trolls, acting as perfect little Cull Machines *at all times*." Ariath scowled darkly, looking up at Asplec. "Why do you think Calart and I get along so well? We have the same anxieties about getting culled for stepping even a single toe out of line."

Asplec did not frown, they did not look upset. They kept a gentle look, and stroked Ariath's hair gently. "We don't need to tell everyone our business, cuz it's just that. It's our business. No one's gonna report you for huggin' yer kismesis-"

Ariath opened her mouth to interject and Asplec just placed a hand on her cheek, and shushed her softly. "No, no. Lemme finish real quick. Ari, we've been datin' for ages. I've been flushed for you watchin' ya talk about FLARP, of all things, and whatever's got your interest at the moment, pale for you without ya even needin' to ask on many sleepless mornin's, I've helped you through all that nonsense with that cult of yours - And I do admit I'm bein' kinda dismissive and mean about the cult thing, but it *really freaks my bean* - So this is hardly anythin' new for me."

"I know you're anxious, Ari, I am too. We all are, every single troll on the planet. Ya gotta trust the people close to us... And you are right, they're right bulgebrains about our relationship most of the time, and we can get them to stop..."

"I am sensing yet another but?" Ariath said, sound a little exasperated.

"Nah, just... It was cool to see ya use your powers like that. Real badass."

"Yeah?" Ariath finally cracked a smile, heaving one last sigh. She was starting to cool down from her shut down.

"Listen," her partner continued, "I'll love ya however ya wanna be loved, on two conditions. One, ya do the same for me, Ari. Speakin' without a hint of irony or jokes here, cuz I love ya in every quad too. Have for a long while."

"You said 'two conditions'; don't tell me you've forgotten how to count now, have you?"

"Please, please cut the cult shit...? For me?"

Ariath was silent for a long few moments, her head resting against Asplec's shoulder. She really had been certain that she'd hidden her fluctuating feelings perfectly well. She smirked up at her partner, and patted them on the cheek a few times.

"I shall *think* about it."

Part 3: Those Who Yearn

[Minutes ago, but only a handful.]

Pheido frowned and looked up at Lolech. They forced a small smile and shrugged. “Kids, eh?”

Lolech sighed and watched the pair disappear further into the forest.
“Yeah... Kids...”

She took a seat on the nearby pew, delivering a distracted punch toward a Flushed Flora that hadn’t learned its lesson. This was what happened when she tried to be nice. It was pointless really; you offer support to some brat that your matesprit is friends with only for them to cycle through every emotion in their repertoire and land on fear. Then again, she *was* a clown. She couldn’t blame them for getting scared off. Casting a glance at Pheido; if the situation were reversed, she couldn’t help but think she might have been scared off too.

“You’re the expert here, how long do these things usually last again, grubcake?”

Pheido let out a dry chuckle at the nickname and shrugged, tugging their blanket closer around them despite the heat. “It takes as long as it takes, my darlin’ quackbeast. Sometimes it’s days, sometimes it’s minutes. I wouldn’t beat yourself up over it, it’s usually a ‘grain tube that broke the humpbeast’s posture pole’ kinda deal. She was probs stressed over somethin’ else, and it all just boiled over.” They said, waving a dismissive hand. They had dealt with the more volatile members of their friend group more times than they could count, and this sort of outburst was hardly new.

The Psionics on the other hand... While new, they were easily passed off as just a result of the anxiety inherent to their current, cullbaiting, activity.

“Who said I'm beating myself up? Hardly my fault if your little friend can't handle congratulations on being a degen like the rest of us.” She looked away again, looking for anything to focus on; when her eyes settled on a pair of trolls tucked away in the corner tittering and papping one another's faces she scowled and instead settled on counting the gaudy bows tied to every surface.

“Speaking of little friends... Is it just the two of us for the evening or did you smuggle in anyone else I should be aware of?”

Pheido quirked an eyebrow, puzzled for a moment, but then made a small noise of recognition. “Ohhhh, ya mean Thegre? Nah! ‘S only you! It's a whole concupiscent affair, ya know? Can't hardly bring your moirail!” They laughed and grinned at Lolech, before following her gaze to the pair of papping ‘Moirails’ in the corner. They made a similarly bothered face before turning back to their Matesprit. “Or uh, I didn't at least...” Looking for a quick and easy way to change the direction of conversation away from the sore topic of their moirail, Pheido threw themselves down beside Lolech, shoulder to shoulder with her. “And whaddya mean degens ‘like the rest of us’? Got some juicy goss y'aint sharing?”

“I think you know *exactly* what I mean when I call you a degen.” She pulled them into a headlock, aggressively noogying their head. “Can't help pale-ing around and getting all conscillatory at any troll that gives you a weepy look?” Lolech grinned down at her partner. Even if the words may have been misconstrued as mean by any other troll, her voice was nothing but affectionate.

Pheido's tone and expression changed immediately into a doofy smirk as they batted playfully, and uselessly, at Lolech's arm around their neck.

They laughed and flailed limply, looking quite pleased that they didn't have to go a moment more of even the shallowest introspection. "Can't help it if I'm absolutely irresistible Lolly. Trolls gimme a weepy look, I give that lil smile in return," They said, demonstrating said smile, "They go wild, and I tell 'em I have a moirail already. It's great." They laughed just a bit too hard at their own joke. As their laugh petered out they wondered, momentarily, if it was actually that great to be stringing people along paleways, even if it was only for a little bit.

"You're despicable sometimes, you know that?" She ceased the noogie, and instead just ruffled and straightened their hair back to be at least *somewhat* presentable. "I have to say though, you're a catch. It's hardly your fault that you have trolls practically lining up for you."

"I may be despicable, but I'm cute as a button, so any felony I commit is a-okay!" They grinned, all gnarled fangs and razor sharp spines. "And exactly. Not my fault I could have any troll I wanted... Makes ya all the more lucky for my picking you, doesn't it?" They teased, cackling and kissing up at Lolech's face. Then they paused a little, splaying against the pew. "You uh... Really didn't want Thegre to be here, huh?"

"It's true, I am pretty lucky." She kissed them back, laughing, only for the mention of a certain moirail to sour her expression. She sat up again, avoiding eye contact with her matesprit. "I never said that." Her voice lacked every ounce of warmth it had held a second ago, and instead held the familiar edge that gave most purples their reputation.

But she couldn't disagree. Like Pheido had said; they were irresistible. It wasn't their fault that they had that helpless look to them; that their presence was universally comforting and secure. That after a long hard day of stress and violence she found herself yearning to bury her face in the crook of their neck and be held safe as her troubles melted away. No, they were, as the fact stood, the perfect epitome of everything a teal *ought* to

be, and like always the issue was her. A disgrace of a clown longing to just get strung along like so many other hapless saps in a one night pale fling.

What she *could* blame Pheido for, however, was having bad taste and picking the most insufferable wreck they could dig out of the bookhive.

“You’re making some pretty uh... Bothered faces there Lolly. Really not doin’ a good job at convincing me that you don’t hate my moirail.” Pheido had sat there, watching Lolech avert her gaze for a little longer than was comfortable for them. They knew that it was hard for her, and even though she was the one who brought it up, it probably wasn’t the best plan to keep at it. They knew how hard it could be to lose a moirail, or could guess at it at least. To have the person you confide in and turn to for support die, and to have no one to talk to about it with... It’s not hard to imagine how isolating that could feel. Pheido, creeping ever closer to their Exile, decided not to think about the fact that they would be met with that same fate soon. They gently placed a hand on Lolech’s shoulder, careful to not get too close to her face, and smiled kindly at her. “D’you wanna talk about what happened Lolly? It’s... It’s okay to talk to me about this stuff. I wanna h-”

Lolech stopped them by, ever so delicately, removing their hand from her shoulder. She shook her head, unable to look back at them. “Pheido I... I love your flirts as much as the next troll, but just because you may feel comfortable cheating on your ‘rail doesn’t mean that I am, you get? Besides, what would Thegre think?”

Pheido winced at the rebuffal, folding their hands in their lap, looking away from Lolech too. The tension between the two made them feel like their arms were made of lead. They wanted to look up, to comfort her despite her protests... But they just couldn’t do it. “You know I’m flushed for you, and you know I’d never cheat on Thegre. It’s not cheating if... If we...” They struggled to find the next words.

“If we vacillate?” She let out a laugh, but there was no amusement in her voice. “I mean I know i joked about us being a couple of degens but I’m...” When she finally turned to face Pheido, her expression was full of heartbreak. Eyes wide with yearning and her eyebrows knit, worried, but as soon as it was there, it was gone and she’d looked away again. “Pheido Ipinle, I love you, but I don’t want to change what’s between us. Not if it risks losing you.”

Pheido was more hurt by that than they’d thought they’d be. Something about the out of hand denial of a vacillating relationship left them with a dull ache in their heart, and they couldn’t figure out why. They were not going to suggest such a thing. Or at least, they didn’t think they were. They knew how vacillating couples got treated, how they got looked at. It’s for lonely trolls who only managed to snag one quadmate, people say. Empress forbid you have other quadmates, then you’re just cheating under a different name. In the end it all boils down to the same thing, regardless of the initial excuse people used to justify saying it: It’s just downright wrong...

They found it hard to dispute any of those claims, and they certainly didn’t feel like they had any designs towards vacillating. It was normal to get a little pale with your matesprit every now and then... Right? Yet they couldn’t shake the shame and embarrassment that bubbled up inside them, made their face flush, and their hands grip their cloak. Lolech watched this turmoil tick over in Pheido’s head, as they’d done for her moments ago. The look on her face was a pitious half-smile, filled with all sorts of complicated emotions, but primarily a supreme sense that what she wanted was so close, and yet completely unreachable. It was a pained smile of yearning.

The two were silent in their agony and shame for longer than either wanted to be. On the far side of the room, one of the musicians warming up hit a sour note, and Lolech visibly flinched. Without thinking, she reached out

and wrapped her arm around her matesprit, and wordlessly pulled them closer. As tense as she was though, she was still gentle with them.

“I don’t.... *Want* to vasculate but... Just stay with me for bit, alright grubcake?”

Pheido’s response was just as instinctual, and just as wordless. Tugging their cape tightly around themselves, they curled up close against their partner’s side. There’s so much they wanted to say, but the words hurt to think of, and there were more still that they didn’t even know how to phrase. So they offered a pinky finger to their matesprit, face buried in her shoulder.

“We can’t... We *have* to talk about this y’know. No matter how long it takes, no matter how much anyone cries, or gets scared... It’s just- Exile is so *soon*, and we- I don’t want us to end up separated with shit like this hanging over us. We need to talk this out.”

Lolech took their pinky finger in hers.

“I promise.” That was all she got out before her words caught in her throat. Closing her eyes, she swallowed hard, and took a long, deep breath, before forcing herself to continue. “Just you, me, and a couple of flavour disks... Does that sound alright?”

Pheido let their eyes fall shut again, leaning against her side, letting their jaw unclench, and relaxing, just a little.

“That sounds perfect.”

Part 4: The Unrequited

[Hours in the future, exactly one and a half.]

“Look, all I’m saying Mimi-”

“That remains a terrible nickname, *Mehmeh*.”

The sheer verbal trainwreck of that sentence sent Prohme Marisu reeling. She was used to horrible scenarios, being a highly illegal Limeblood, thought extinct for thousands of years, and hunted almost for sport by every part of Alternian society. But the horror of her lovely name being mangled into ‘Mehmeh’ was worse than anything else she’d ever suffered.

Well, not really, the missiles were probably worse, but this was a close second to her. She managed to recover just in time to avoid getting her foot run over by the giant cello her Kismesis’ fishy patron was wheeling around. “Hey! Watch it Patron! Get me killed and... Well, you’ll probably get a medal, but still don’t do it!”

The tall seadweller looked down his nose at Prohme, made a haughty snort, and left. As his cloak billowed out behind him, making him look like he was gliding across the ground, Prohme’s eye twitched. She couldn’t stand that guy. The height of pomp. He was the reason she was up at whatever ungodly hour of the afternoon it was after all, so she felt like a little spite was allowable. She turned back to the only person making the whole affair bearable, her kismesis Mistrl Roimer, with a similarly illegal Candy Red blood, and continued to idiotic line of conversation she had begun moments before. “So Mimi,” She said, and immediately darted into her next line before Mistrl could get a chance to complain, “All I mean to

say is that you can totally play the keyboard with your feet and the cello with your hands. The only reason I'm here is because you're an underachiever."

Now it was Mistr's turn to get a twitchy eye under control. She took a steadying breath and stepped closer to Prohme. "I know you can play piano." Mistr poked Prohme in the chest, lightly. "I know you can play it *well*. Tell me, you can read sheet music, yes?"

"Well duh, of co—"

"Then you are to read the provided sheet music, play *only* that, and if you even so much as think of nuking my patron's friend's human wedding just because you came up with some amazing revolutionary justification for it, I will be *very* upset with you. Do you understand?"

Prohme, feeling sufficiently brow beaten, nodded and raised her hands in surrender. "Hey hey! I get it! You'll punch through to my pusher if you poke any more." Mistr poked Prohme one final time before her face finally softened from its scowl.

"So you're sure I can't just... Improv a little?" Prohme grinned quickly recovered quickly, leaning in close with an overly chummy arm thrown around Mistr's shoulder.

"If you move even a single note off the sheet, I'll throw you off the stage."

Prohme burst out laughing, doubling over. "As if you could li- AGH! HEY WAIT-!" Prohme cried out and flailed wildly as Mistr picked her up with no evidence of effort on her face. In reality, she was just very good at masking exertion, but she'd hardly let Prohme know that.

“You were saying?” Mistrl said, her face neutral, but her voice belied the smugness she felt. Prohme was not a short Troll, but looked like a drowned cat, going for the eyes and throat with her claws as she struggled into Mistrl’s grip. Mistrl looked thoroughly unimpressed, but having Prohme taking the back foot in one of these little Pitch skirmishes for once was nice. As much as they were the normal for any sort of Pitch relationship, and she and Prohme definitely had a more tame one, being the annoying rather than the annoyed was a nice feeling. Mistrl could see why Prohme did this all the time. As Prohme made another swipe for Mistrl’s throat, the novelty wore out and she unceremoniously dumper her partner to the ground.

“How the hell are you that strong?” Prohme whined as she was finally dropped. She scrambled up out of the pile of limbs she had flopped into, sulked, and made her way over to the not yet set up keyboard and harp. “Whatever, I’ll do the set up. You... Schmooze, or whatever it is you’re supposed to do at fancy parties.” She said, as Mistrl merely looked at her, highly unamused.

She shooed away her girlfriend’s fishy patron, Patron Backur as he tried to protest that “No, stop! That harp is older than your Ancestor, and-!” He was cut off by Prohme simply sitting herself down on the ground and starting to work. She was thankful for *something* to do with her hands, something to occupy her idle fidgets with. She was just trying to make a joke, and Mistrl had taken it the entire wrong way. Of course she wasn’t going to ruin this for her. Honestly, she got the drones called on Mistrl during one show, and all of sudden she’s always going to ruin her performances. Prohme was a performer too, she knew how important it was to not flub big gigs like this...

She tried very hard to ignore the cognitive dissonance created by this knowledge and her previous actions. She rationalised it as purely normal kismesissitude behaviour. You were... Supposed to endanger your kismesis’ life, career, and general well-being, right? But then again, did Prohme even want that? Hate. That’s the word that kept sticking out in her

mind. It was that sometimes, sure. When she tried her best to show Mistrl just how much leverage a Candy Red could have in stirring revolutionary thinking, and Mistrl just refused to even listen. They'd had proper full on screaming matches over it. She'd talked to some of her friends about it, and had been told that's just how Kismesissitudes work, but she certainly didn't like it.

Every time that Prohme tried to give her a push; to help her be something more than just some fish's music box, she was shut down with the same look of anger and disgust on Mistrl's face. It was awful, horrid even. Sure, it made her angry, but only at the situation, not at Mistrl herself. She didn't like being angry at Mistrl, and hating her situation could only be so righteous for so long, especially with Mistrl refused to do anything about it. So yes, she thought, she did have Pitch feelings for Mistrl but that wasn't it. It wasn't everything. She cared for her so deeply, and yearned until her blood pusher felt sore. She hated that word, yearning. Made her feel even more like a YA protagonist. Yet, it wasn't the *wrong* word.

Would she admit it though? Now that was another matter entirely.

"Prohme, have you listened to a single word I've said?"

"Whuh?" Prohme's body jerked upright. Sure she had been watching her lips move, and the two beauty marks under her eye, but listening? "Of course i was listening. You want me to.. Uh..."

"Move the..."

"RIGHT. The harp. Almost forgot, Mimi." She said quickly, adding in a wink before she went to lift the harp. She was strong, undoubtedly, but this thing was dense and huge. As soon as she touched it, she was almost bodily tackled out of the way by a furious looking Mistrl.

“The pew! Move! The! Pew!” Mistrl said, gently putting the huge harp back down. She scowled at Prohme and made a frustrated noise. “You’ve done nothing but be wildly antagonistic this entire time, and the second I ask you to help with one thing, you don’t listen to a single word I say! To think I even praised you!” She sounded beyond done with Prohme, and went to open her mouth again, but all that came out was another noise of frustration. “I swear to every dark being under the sea and lurking in the sky above, Prohme Marisu, if you’re building up to ruining another performance of mine just to show me-”

“WOAH WOAH WOAH! ‘S NOT LIKE THAT, ALRIGHT?!” Was it like that? No, she was certain that it was not, in fact, like that. She was not going to, how did Mistrl phrase it? She was not going to ‘nuke things.’ She opened her mouth to say just that, to reassure Mistrl about it, but the words got lost in shame. She felt... Bad. She couldn’t articulate it beyond that. She felt like a cloud was hanging over her as she shifted the pew over, then went back to wiring up the piano and sound system. The dull ache of yearning and compassion, a want to see Mistrl happy and living the best life she could... It was as far from hate as she could feel, and yet any time she tried to help, it just ended up like this. A dark fog of ambiguous *bad*. She hated it, she hated that the result of her trying something compassionate only produced hate, so she worked away, getting audio set up so she didn’t have to think about anything other than which colourful bug wire went into what colourful bug port, and the monotony relaxed her.

Relaxation came with the sad side effect of drifting thoughts. Thoughts drifting to the same anxieties she was already trying to escape. Memories of shouting matches conducted over understandable misunderstandings of well-meaning attempts to help Mistrl... And a lot of realisations that despite her best intentions, a lot of the ways she’d tried to help Mistrl haven’t been the best. She and her partner obviously had very different ideas on how to spend the limited life their blood colours promised, and Prohme aggressively pushing her own ideal of “Life fast, die young, leave a pretty

corpse” wasn’t helping anyone. Prohme had to admit it, MistrI was acutely aware of her own mortality, and merely doing as much as she can to live a peaceful and self-fulfilling life as she could, rather than risk hitching herself to a revolutionary spark that was possibly nothing more than a flash in the pan.

Finally finishing up the wiring, and now just staring off into the wood, her eyes having finally adjusted to the bright lighting, she considered her own stance on the issue. Prohme liked the risk of it all. Taunting drones, stoking revolution, if she could light something bigger with the short spark of life she had guaranteed, it would be more than enough to make her doom worth it.

“What’s going on with you?” Prohme was snapped from staring off into space by her Kismesis suddenly looming over her, arms crossed and a look of half-worry, half-bemusement on her face. “You were so gung-ho even just a minute ago, but now you’re all... down. You’re staring off into space and working like you’re part of an assembly line. What’s wrong? Is it because we’re pitch at a flush event? Or you don’t know anyone? Because I can assure you I don’t know anyone either.” MistrI looked over her shoulder at the various gathered trolls and her Patron talking animatedly at the groom. She grimaced. “Frankly, i’m not sure I even want to.”

Prohme popped up onto her feet and, her conflicting thoughts temporarily stowed away, wrapped MistrI in a quick, warm hug. “Look, you’re right. I should be paying attention. This is an important gig for ya. I’ll be on my best behaviour, and I promise no rebel stuff. I’m sorry for messing about when you’re already stressed. I went a bit too far.” Before MistrI could respond, Prohme winked at her and skipped off to go grab the last parts of necessary gear for their show.

“Come back here! What in the world was-” MistrI leaned against her harp with a heavy sigh, as she watched Prohme run off. It was exhausting

dealing with her sometimes. Prohme could jump so drastically in energy in mere moments, and it often left Mistrl with whiplash. Besides, having to chase her down before she got herself killed 'for the revolution' was exhausting for someone as suited to the sedentary life as herself. As Prohme finally grabbed the last of the gear, and started trialling all the equipment, Mistrl heaved another sigh and finally let herself rest. She'd been running around handling set up, liaising between her patron, the far too laid back groom, and the frazzled bride. She head earned a sit down.

True, she thought, Prohme was always... A considerable amount to deal with, but she was behaving stranger than usual now, and it had Mistrl concerned, especially with that oddly sincere apology. She was her Kismesis after all! It wasn't like she was uncaring about her wellbeing. What good is a pair of scissors without two blades to clash together? What good is a blade when it's worn itself dull without care and maintenance? Mistrl paused for a second and scowled. She'd been spending too much time with Patron, and now she could only think in blade metaphors. Anyway, she thought, shaking off the miasma of swords that occasionally settled over her, it wasn't like she didn't enjoy the ribbing and jabs now and then. Otherwise she would never have put up with Prohme so long. Afterall, what was the point of dating an anarchist if they didn't keep you on their toes?

Plainly put, she cared about her kismesis. She cared quite dearly, and as she watched Prohme's fingers dance expertly along the keys of the piano, warming it up, she felt something in her chest stir. Maybe there was something else there? She humoured the thought, letting it dance warmly through her mind as she stared up at the dappled canopy and basked in the sunlight, eyes closed.

"HEY MISTRL, CHECK THIS OUT!" The unfamiliar, and far too jubilant cry from Prohme rang every alarm bell in Mistrl's mind, and throwing her immediately out of her relaxation as her head whipped around to see Prohme holding a huge hooting cholerbear above her head. Her arms and

legs were shaking, and her face was gripped by the effort of it. Still, she was grinning, and Mistrl just stared, slack jawed.

Then again, Mistrl thought, watching Prohme drop the bride's mom onto herself, maybe... Maybe it was just Pitch, at least as long as Prohme kept up with nonsense like this. Pulling herself out of her stupor, she couldn't help but laugh as she headed over to help out her kismesis.

"You really are incorrigible."

Part 5: The Lovers

[One single hour in the future, exactly.]

Marrom Sullus, one of six Violet bloods on the entire planet, was not a nervous man. When dressed in a fine suit as he was now, he was usually at his most relaxed. He was typically quite neutral about everything he came across, and he certainly prized this skill as it allowed him to think tactically about most everything he came across. Even brand new situations could be easily approached with a logical mind. This was exactly why Marrom's current flustered state was so worrying to the two other Violets who watched nearby.

His nervous pacing, and anxious muttering of vows that he clearly already knew, as he wasn't even looking at the paper clutched so tightly in his hands that it was half scrunched into a ball. Tarluk Uchtek, an ushanka and fancy fur-lined coat wearing Violet who shared the one broken horn look with the considerably shorter groom, looked worriedly at his friend. With a grimace, he looked over at the other, tag-along Violet, Patron Backur, who shared the groom's drooping, angler-fish-like horns, and current grimace, but took his pompous outfit to a whole other level.

"He..." Tarluk began, but his word died off gesturing vaguely at Marrom anxiously pacing a hole into the stage.

"Looks bad," Patron nodded, folding his arms and shifting nervously, "I agree Uchtek."

"How uh... How do we help?" Tarluk said, beginning to look a little anxious himself.

“Well, I was talking with the bride and her researcher friend, and they spoke of a fabled ‘Bachelor party.’ Supposedly some sort of liminal passage rite, it allows the groom to transfer from unmarried life to married life with no regret.”

Tarluk looked a little in awe at the knowledge of the other Violet and nodded quickly. “Yeah. Okay. Right. So... We uh... We don’t need to kill anyone, right?”

“I am... Not certain.” Patron said, refusing to drop the scowl or crossed arms pose. “They didn’t really say what it entailed, but the human apparently called it a ‘Night for The Lads.’”

Hearing the name of the famous, but long gone, roving gang of vicious purple blooded laughsassins, Tarluk looked absolutely shocked. “Humans have Lads too, a-and they copy their nightly escapades as... As part of a love ritual?!”

“Truly humans are a terrifying species, I cannot agree more. But, as that is the case, one must presume that a wedding, described as an expression of ‘love and care’ denotes a transition away from the violent, Bacchanal of one’s youth. In this case, taking one last night ‘For the Lads’ must be some sort of last sacrifice or homage to these brutal figures.”

Tarluk nodded sagely. “I see, I see. Patron, your understanding... It never does cease to amaze me.”

“Well, what can I say. I’m merely-”

“Y’know with how smart you are, I really don’t get why Marrom hates you so much.”

“He what?” Patron looked puzzled, and then laughed robotically. “Haha, I see. This is one of your ‘jokes.’ See it is funny, as we are ‘*best friends*’ and, to use another wise human term ‘homies for life.’”

“...” Tarluk blinked, then nodded, grinning. “Yeah, anyway! We’re a bit late on getting this... Bachelor bacchanal underway, but then again this whole thing was rather sudden. I’m sure the these ‘Human Lads’ wouldn’t mind us doing the whole affair post-facto, as long as we got enough violence and-”

“Nudity, the humans were *quite* explicit that there is some degree of nudity.”

“Right, right yes. Nude violence. I will have to clear that with my kismeisis but thank you Patron. But once we have the Bacchanal, nudity, and avaricious excess all sorted and ready, the lateness of it all shouldn’t be too offensive.”

“Righto then!” Patron said, clapping his hands and beginning to stride off toward Marrom. “We shall rouse our Groom’s spirit with jovial gentlemanly discussion of the Bachelor’s Bacchanal!”

“I thought it was called a bachelor party...?”

Patron waved a hand dismissively and said no more as he appeared, long and spindly, behind Marrom, draping an arm over his shoulders. “Marrom, my friend...” Tarluk hopped to it, and copied the maneuver, appearing, even more spindly and long, at Marrom’s other side.

“My good buddy Marrom...”

Marrom Sullus paused and bent underneath the weight of two larger highbloods using him as a bar top. He looked at each in turn and scowled. “Can I help you? I have to memorise these vows...”

“Memorize.. Can you not just read them? It’s what we intend to do with the mandatory ‘toast’ reading later.”

“No, no! These must be learned off by heart and- Oof!” Marrom was suddenly shaken by a thunderous clap to the back from Tarluk.

“You already know them my friend! The paper is a crumpled mess in your hands, and all you are doing is wearing a hole in the stage with worry. No more fretting over this affair. Instead, join as we tell you of-!” Tarluk’s words were cut off immediately by a long flourish on the harp. In less than a second, an electric organ picked up, and the two musicians started in on the rolling piece that introduced the coming of the bride.

Dressed in a flowing, and stunningly white gown, embroidered with emerald and amethyst, Calart appeared from the mouth of her cave hive, flanked by her Bride’s Maids. Each woman was armed with an ornate, ceremonial weapon. In the bride’s hands was a crossbow of black lacquered wood, with golden limbs and similar gold filigree, ornamented with bows of white silk, and loaded with a deadly barbed, poisoned bolt. It was the job of the bride, and her maids of honour (A group similar to an honour guard), to let the groom and his best men (His most capable warriors) know that the bride is ready and able to kill the groom if the marriage is not equitable and loving. To further this show of force the bridesmaids were dressed in the most hideously garish outfits they had been able to find. Between the golden shoulder pads and three cascading layers of feathered peplums, it was hard to determine where exactly your eye was meant to be drawn. The crown of wooden horns adorning their heads, a homage to the imperial drones and orphaners of old, completed the threatening look.

On Calart’s left was Ariath, in her Maid of Honour regalia, holding an ornate cavalry sword in her hand, crossed across her chest, the blade framing the hair that fell over half her face. On Calart’s right, with a maul resting against

an extended palm, was Lolech, the much scarier of the two. Calart approached her hooting-cholerbear lusus and mounted her side saddle, crossbow cradled close to her chest as the basket of razor sharp petals held in her mother's mouth began to swing back and forth, spreading a deadly, pink floral path behind the procession.

As the music came to a close, the bride and her maids of honour ascended to the stage as Hootmom bounded off to her next task. The bride and her companions curtsied to the groom and his best men, who bowed in return. Pheido, standing at a podium on the altar, grinned tiredly at the pair.

"Okay so... 'Sup. We uh... Have one thing to do before we continue here? The humans were insistent about this one..." They turned to Calart and showed her a clipboard with a checklist on it. The next required check was "An important adult 'gives away' the Bride to the Groom." The phrasing made Calart's heart sink. She knew exactly who that should've been. She knew just who she would have loved to see right here beside her to hand her over to the next step of her life...

Her hands tightened even harder around the crossbow, her claws digging into the wood. She took a breath and decided that... While she missed Granpa dearly, and she wanted him here more than anything, she had come this far without him. She'd found love, maybe not the same kind he had provided, but she was undoubtedly loved by the man currently looking at her. She'd found friends, who loved her and she loved dearly. She was a strong huntress, and she'd survived, and that's all he'd wanted for her. Calart knew that Granpa wouldn't want his absence to ruin the day, and she wasn't going to let it. She turned to Pheido, grinned, and shook her head. "No. I'm not a letter or some wriggling day gift. No one needs to, or can, give me to anyone else."

Pheido blinked a few times, gave her a thumbs up, then returned to the podium and began reading again. "Dear friends, frenemies, and people I've

never seen before in my entire life, and who the empire would kill me for associating with.” They began, giving a pointed finger gun to Prohme, who paused in her light piano playing to return it, with an added wink and click of her tongue. “We are gathered here today to do... A buncha bologna really, but it’s neat xeno-bologna made from alien meat and... Love? Served in honour of that human emotion called ‘Jesus...’ I’ve lost this metaphor entirely, but anyway the point is I love xenoshit, and Calart loves mushy garbage. So we decided to drag you along for this indulgent plate of pork-flavoured romanticism.” Pheido paused as they turned to the next page of their script, muttering under their breath, “I went off script and went right back to talking about bologna, what is wrong with me...?”

“Right, so! These sorts of ceremonies don’t really happen in troll culture, but lots and lots of cultures have these romantic dedication ceremonies, yeah? This particular human one is... Not super compatible with Troll culture, cuz it talks a bunch about just having one partner forever and ever, but like... We’re so much better that we have three partners at a time just normally. So we edited this one a bit.” Pheido made a gesture, and the bride’s maids lowered their weapons and, with the best men, took a step back from the bride and groom who stepped forward and held each other’s hands.

“So... This ceremony is about two trolls with... Super different life expectancies promising that they’ll be faithful for as long as the lower blooded one lives, and that this partner will retain a special place in the higher blooded one’s pusher as they continue from there one.

“We are here both as witnesses to make sure these guys keep their promises, but also so we can be here to support our friends as they acknowledge a special commitment of flushed affection for each other.

“Yeah and that’s... All the preamble really, finally y’all know why you’re here, and we can get the fuck on with it! I was supposed to do a reading of

some sort here but... Look, none of us here are religious, and I'm a librarassimilator, not a legislacerator. I don't do oration. So we're just... Gonna move on, yeah? Great.

"Now we have the vows! On top of the other guff I just mentioned, these two have conjured special personalised promises that they have written onto sharpened strips of cloth! A literal blood binding to insure they won't be broken! It's so cool." Pheido managed to stop ranting about how interesting they found the whole affair, to gesture at Calart, who produced an olive ribbon, with troll glyphs on it in violet. Then Pheido gestured at Marrom, who produced a ribbon of inverse colouration. The two read off their vows, secretly to each other, winding the threads around each others hands, not even wincing as the sharp edges of the odd fibre dug into their skin, bringing small droplets of blood to intermix with their tied up hands.

Pheido, holding a candle in their hands, tipped it toward the flash-paper like cloth, which went up in flame instantly. "Now your vows are sealed, and you... Like, you can go back on them? No marriage cops are gonna show up and stop you, but like... Symbolically you shouldn't." The pair of trolls seemed happy with that agreement, so Pheido turned the final part of the ceremony. With a whistle, the Ring Bear, Calart's mom, came sprinting from the side. She skidded to a halt, a velveteen pillow resting perfectly on her head. The pillow, holding rings matching the colours of the couple standing at the altar, was proffered by Calart's happily chirping mom. Each of the pair placed the ring of their colour onto their partner's ring finger, and clasped hands once again.

"These rings are a lasting representation of the ribbons you just tied... And now there's only two last things to do!"

Calart blinked. Two more things? Had there been more to the ceremony than what she had thought? She shot a worried look to Marrom, but before she could ask, Pheido continued. "You may now kiss the fish!"

There was a raucous cheer from their gathered friends, and the two mutant musicians (mutesicians?) as Calart swept Marrom into a dip, kissing him with all the love she could muster as he wrapped his arms around her, laughing, grinning wider than anyone there had ever seen him do, and wrapped his arms tightly around her. After minutes of giggling, and kissing, and generally the two being obscenely cute, Pheido clapped their hands and separated the pair. “Okie dokie dorks! Time for the last thing!”

Calart, still planting little kisses on Marrom’s cheeks and nose, looked over. “Oh?”

Pheido gesticulated wildly as the multilayered grubcake being wheeled out by Calart’s, now visibly exhausted, mom.

“Cake!”

The rest of the day went by without any hitch. It was just joy, and friends talking and jokingly ribbing at each other, and basking in the love of their friends. Every couple can’t help but be infected by the lovey dovey air. Difficult and tangled feelings are banished in favour of care and gentle intimacy. People are held close, kisses are exchanged, many cuddles are had, spread across the soft couches of Calart’s cave hive.

Ariath and Asplec were asleep first, curled up together inside of a woefully overstuffed bean bag chair, the exhaustion of running through a forest for a half hour while also literally reversing their sleep schedule having caught up to them. After that Prohme and MistrI called it a night, thanking the hosts for the food and the gig, and left hand in hand. They were mostly silent on their way home, but it was a comfortable, warm, and gentle silence that held nothing but care.

Pheido and Lolech took the one guest room after all was said and done, and Pheido promptly passed out for an admittedly unhealthy amount of time. It was wibes before they and their matesprit were finally able to have the discussion they'd talked about... But by then they had already given into the pitious yearning that burned in each of their hearts, and their relationship had transitioned to something... more.

Despite all the care, love, affection, warmth, and blurring of quadrants in the safety and privacy of a literal cave in the middle of absolutely nowhere... Calart couldn't fully unwind. Something bugged her. Something big. She was happy, she was safe, the people she loved most in the whole world (Or at least most of them), were gathered around her for hours and hours. Even in a perfect setting for relaxation and shrugging off the burden of existence under the imperial boot, she couldn't relax. The *best time possible* to forget for a moment that the society she lived in was broken beyond repair and she was nothing more than a cog in a machine that churned out infinite slaughter, and even then she couldn't stop worrying about what might happen next, or if they'd done something cullable, or if the drones were already on the way.

The thoughts caught her in an anxious loop, and she started spiralling down that familiar pit that she knew would take her hours to pull herself out of... But she welcomed it. Being happy and comfortable was not normal to her, and it made her, paradoxically, very uncomfortable. She was watching and waiting for when everything would go wrong. It made her feel like she was walking on a sheet of glass, and everyone was telling her that it was concrete, and trying to get her to jump on it.

Laid on her lounge plank with Marrom, she started curling in on herself, further and further-

“Cal?” She felt a gentle hand on her shoulder, and turned to see her matesprit, her *husband*, bleary eyed, but looking at her concerned. “Artie, are you alright?” She wrapped her arms tightly around him, and he wrapped his arms around her in turn.

“No. I’m not alright.” Her voice was quiet, and shaking.

“Can... Is it something I can help with?” Marrom didn’t seem surprised, and every drop of worry had faded from his voice, now replaced with calm reassurance.

“I think so? I... I’m scared, Marrom. Plain and simple.”

“I know you get anxious, Callie, but-”

“No. No, this is different. I can’t think about anything but... Death. What we did today was so beyond illegal, every single part of it. The one thing I’m glad of about the whole situation is that it’s really easy for me to tell you the punishment. Death. I die in fire and explosions, and no one cares. Everyone moves on, literally everyone, and no one misses the one olive who burnt to a crisp.”

Marrom was silent for a little while, and just held his wife tightly. He had to admit, the thought scared him a little too. He was a violet, but there were people bigger than him, there were clowns, there was the empire. Violets are rare, but not irreplaceable. He, just like anyone else, could vanish and nothing would change. But, the chance of it ever happening to him was astronomically low, and the chance of it happening to Calart...

Her fears were real, and founded in years of lived experience, rather than his idle posturing. He took her in close to him again, and gently cupped her jaw, stroking her cheek with his thumb. He smiled and pressed their foreheads together, horns clanking. “Calart... You’re safe. I promise. I know

words may seem meaningless, but I do not speak without meaning what I say. I do not worry about much in my life, and I never will. I promise you that I will do everything I can to make sure that the future you, quite understandably, fear never ever arises.”

“You can’t ever promise that.” Calart said, her tone bitter. She’d listened to comforting lies like this before, on countless occasions from Granpa. Promises of a brighter, gentler world... And she’d seen that world reduced to ash forever. She wanted desperately to believe that there was something other than a life of fear and subservience, but she could no longer even imagine it.

“You’ll live hundreds of my lifetimes Marrom, in complete peace. You... You can’t help me.”

“I’ll spend your entire life with you, and only you. That is what I promised today. I wrote it, bound it around your hands, sealed it with my blood, a kiss, and a ring. I cannot, under any circumstances, go against those vows. I promised to love you, and to make sure you were safe, and loved, and you got to do all the astounding things I *know* you are capable of.” Marrom said, squeezing his wife’s hand tightly, pressing their wedding bands together.

“I have no worries, Calart. My life is assured. Because of that? My only worry will be you. You, because I love you in a way I cannot even begin to express nor am yet to fully comprehend, you are always at the forefront of my mind. I think fondly of you, always. I am not here to own you, or fix you, or make you something you are not. I am here to take on your worries, to help you, to be there when you need stability, and push you when you feel your feet cement.” He gripped her shoulders, steadying her as if she were about to fall. “When you begin to spiral, when everything begins to spin and sink, I will help pull you out.”

“Never forget this: There are trillions of stars in the sky, and if you tallied up each and every one, you would still not be able to tally my love for you, Calart Emisto.” Marrom said, embracing her tightly. Her body shook, and tears began to flow, as she let the stress of an entire lifetime flood out of her.

She cried, and cried, finally for once feeling truly safe. She sniffled and hiccuped and cupped her husband’s face. She kissed him, and clacked their horns together gently, drooping angler’s lantern against a crosshair. She laughed, and stroked his cheeks. “You are... Such a goddamn sap. I... Thank you. I-” She sighed and let go of Marrom’s face. She laid on her back and stared at the ceiling, adorned with pictures, trophies, memories of an idyllic time to lull her to sleep through terror. “It will take a long time for me to... To stop being scared of everything. It will take a long time for me to learn to be safe. But... I’ll believe you Marrom. I will trust you to guide me to the future that I cannot imagine.”

She turned back to him and tucked her head in under his chin. She wrapped herself around him and closed her eyes. “I can’t let this be one sided either. If you’re there for me, I’ll be there for you. I know you said your future was assured... But, I want to help you too. I love you, just the same way that you promised me that you love me... Something beyond the quadrants, something we can’t describe.” She squished his cheeks together, and smiled. “I love you, Marrom Sullus, and that is guaranteed by blood, word, and ring.”

Marrom closed his eyes, and wrapped his arms tightly around Calart. “But for now dear... It’s so, so late, and I am exhausted. You sound like you’re about to drop... So for now? We just...” Before he could finish speaking, he was asleep again. Calart barely contained a laugh and, for the first time since she was six sweeps old, relaxed and drifted off to sleep with not a single dream of fire, drones, or a hollowness in her heart... But of tender embraces, and love she did not need, or want to describe.

It was a love she cherished more than every star in the sky, for that love promised her a future that she could finally dream of.

~ *Fin* ~





@BrushBanditArts

12/20/20

CHARACTER SELECT



LALITHA PERLITE



MALES

JINGO

@KITTEBATS





By Wizardwiz. Featuring fantrolls made by Mikkynga, Skyeec2 and Glassgoblin

Edited by Skyeec2 and Pika.

Art by Mikkynga

>Be MJ

Today, you are 18 sweeps old... or was it 20? You're not very good at keeping track of how this whole sweep thing works. At this point you're just too afraid to ask anyone for help with it. You don't want to be known as the troll who doesn't know how old he is, now do you?

Your Hive is nicely situated by the sea, not that you care for the sea, it's just your Lusus needs salt water to live. She's a TeethBeast, she does most of the shopping in the hive, and by shopping, you mean killing small sea creatures and bringing them back to you. There was also that one time she brought back a troll's arm, but you try and repress that memory. In fact, you should probably try harder at that. You spend most of your days coming up with humorous anecdotes to make people laugh. You like to consider yourself a bit of a comedian in this regard, bringing smiles to the trolls of Alternia. Though you have found that most people would rather like to laugh at you than with you. But as a true comedian you have given the people what they want. Now

all of your jokes are self-deprecating in nature. You like to think that's just your personal brand of humor. Sure, making fun of yourself constantly might sound like bad a thing, but it's not like jokes have ever hurt anyone. You're totally 30% sure that your jokes have no deep psychological effects on you. Though you have pondered if people would like you if you didn't make though kind of jokes.

Anyway, today is the day that you're going to try and open up to people more. Let people know that you're not just here to make jokes and throw pies. That you are more than just a clown...

Before that however, you spend an hour trying to give yourself a good pep talk to boost your confidence. Unfortunately, you spend this hour pointing out your many, many, flaws. After successfully making yourself feel even worse, you take a deep breath and log onto Pesterchum. You first hover your cursor over the handful of friends you have. Pondering if you should strike up a conversation with them first. However, you decide against it, since you have very little interesting things to say besides "Hi". So, you move your cursor and click on public servers to venture out into the big wide web.

After scrolling down for what must seem like hours, you finally stumble upon a chat room that seems like the right one for you. It is titled as "Creatives and Performers Appreciation ". You guess that it's probably a chat room dedicated to like-minded trolls such as yourself. You feel your heartbeat inside your chest. Could this be the group that you've been looking for? Could this virtual chat room be the place where you'll make new life long connections and help you to finally get out of your comfort zone!! Will the trolls that inhabit it like you? After a few seconds of spacing out you click and join. They'll like you... right?



+++ MaskedJokester has joined the chatroom +++

DM: SO, THERE I was, HOOFBEAST charging at ME, IT'S eyes filled with rage, READY to skewer ME whole! MATE.

DM: IT was then, I knew, THOSE would be my last moments on Alternia! MATE.

ZZ: o- ZZo theen wat happened!????!!!! -o

ZZ: o-Hi MazzdedJozzterzz!!-o

NL: well he l1ved clearly :) otherw1se he wouldn't be here tell1ng us 1t now would he :)

NL: sup Jokey :)

DM: QUIET NL! DON'T interrupt ME while I'M telling MY tale, MATE.

DM: NOW, YOU'VE made ME lose MY train of THOUGHT! WHERE was I? MATE.

CN: >> --- you were experiencing last moments on Alternia --->

CN: >> --- Welcome to our chat MaskedJokester. Hope you enjoy our stay --->

DM: YES! THAT'S it! THERE I was in the arena of death, PICTURING MY dear Jayyrd! RADIANT in his beauty! MATE!

DM: THEN, when the Hoofbeast lulled was into a false sense of victory! I wiped out my cape and confused the beast! AS it passed I deal the finishing blow!! MATE!

ZZ: o- WOAH!!!!!! Dat zzo cool!!!! -o

HD: h1h2h wo3h th4t sounds pretty sweet m5n did like blood get in y6 mouth?

ZZ: o- BRB! Gotzz ta get me mor zznakzz! –o

++ ZippityZapp went idle ++

HD: If so wh7t did it t8ste like?

Well it seems like things are going pretty well so far. Granted that's probably because you haven't opened your mouth yet. You decide to wait for this Matador guy to finish telling his story. Man, he sounds pretty cool. Cooler than you that's for sure, he's actually risking his life to entertain people. You're just some two-bit comedian. You don't want interrupt and inadvertently change the topic, now do you. Besides it can't be too much longer, it seems like he's coming to an end. In the meantime, you try and think of a cool away of introducing yourself everyone. Perhaps you can greet everyone with a cool catchphrase like, "Get ready for a laugh a minute HONK!!!". You cringe a little after thinking up that one. That's the kind of catchphrase that can follow a person. Like come on! Laugh a minute that sounds so lame. Besides honking cliché at this point, everyone and their Lusus does it. Though you could Honk ironically, but you are nowhere that good of a comedian to pull that one off. After pondering this for some time you soon realize that 20 minutes have already passed. You check back on the chat and it looks like DM has rolled onto another story. It also seems to be another near-death experience, this time with 3 Hoofbeasts. How many stories does he have like that? Well it's now or never better introduce yourself!

DM: AND then, I jumped on top of that beast plunging MY sword into its back!

MATE!

MJ: [u] Üm hi. Knock Knock

DM: EXCUSSE ME! BUT I was in the getting to the best part! MATE!

DM: THIS ain't the place for you to workshop ya bad stand up! MATE!

MJ: [u] Sorry sorry, jÜst thought a joke woÜld break the ice a bit haha.

NL: The only th1ng your break1ng 1s our heads :)

CN: >> --- ouch, I felt that one from here --->

You feel a little notch in your heart. You feel like hitting yourself for opening with a joke, and a lame knock knock joke no less. Seems like all that pondering for an opener got you nowhere. You look down at your husk and type a response

MJ: [u] Hahah nice bÜrn on me NL.

NL: Please call me Kneonn ;) and you are? :)

MJ: [u] Oh I'm MJ.

CN:>> ---I think he's asking about your real name, you have a name, right? --->

You have never really told anyone your name. In fact, it's been so long since anyone has used it, that you yourself kind of feel weird when using. Besides that's a whole other person who no one wants to know about. You are MJ the fun-having jokester ready to give good vibes to everyone.

MJ: [u] Pff coÜrse I do! It's jÜst lame as heck! MJ is where it at fam!

HD: I c9n respect th1t man sometimes 2 n3me just doesn't vibe with y4

HD: t5ke th6t sucker 7nd dunk in the tr8sh

HD: then t9ke like 1 sn2ck to go g3rb4ge b5gels 6re hell7 t8sty :}

DM: THAT'S gross! MATE!

NL: So MJ :) What br1ng you our chart of ours :)?

MJ: [u] Well I'm a kind of a performer myself kinda.

MJ: [u] Kinda like a comedian. I try and be fÜnny.

NL: A comd1an eh? :) Well that expla1ns the joke you entered w1th :)

DM: WELL funny man! IF you're such a funny guy, HOW about you show us a real joke! ONE that's actually funny! MATE!

NL: I'm sure we all would l1ke to hear some of your mater1al :)

HD: you know me i'm 9lw1ys up for 2 good joke :}

CN: >> --- will it be one of those arousing jokes? --->

MJ: [u] Ümm..

++ ZippityZapp is online ++

ZZ: o- Got my zznakzz!! Wat I mizzzz??-o

HD: mj is gonn9 tell us 1 joke

HD: 2lso what sn3cks you got :}

ZZ: o- OOOOOOOO!!! -o

ZZ: o- Alzzo hazz cipzz! -o

Looks like it's time to win this chatroom over with a bit of your classic comedy acts.

Yep you're going to blow these guys away with these jokes. Suddenly you feel a bit light headed and some fluttering in your stomach. It seems like you're getting a little bit of stage fright. Uh oh...

MJ: [u] Ümm okay... how aboÜt this this one...

MJ: [u] So, I heard that Ür hÜsk was rÜnning.

MJ: [u] Ü better go catch it!! Hahah

CN: >> --- But our husk is already running? --->

CN: >> --- How is that supposed to be funny? --->

MJ: [u] oh well Ü see I was talking aboÜt a different kind of rÜnning. Like Üh...

ZZ: o-Hahah!!! HZZKZZ!! -o

ZZ: o-Thy no mov!! ZZit ZZplit ma cipzz!! -o

DM: THAT'S it!? MATE!

DM: WHERE is the style, WHERE is the presentation! MATE!

DM: I'VE heard better jokes from Hoofbeats trying to gore ME! MATE!

NL Don't m1nd Setlur :;) 1 want to hear more of your work :) I know you must be us1ng your horr1ble jokes now to warm us up for the good stuff :) r1ght MJ :)?

MJ: OH yeah! That was sÜpposed to be a dÜd haha... it was meant to be lame...

HD: h3h4h husks c5n't run like th6t they got no legs h7h8h

HD: running husks h9h1h2 m3n dud or not th4t's funny m5n :}

HD: I me6n where would they even run to?

HD: H7h8h

MJ: [u] haha yeah...

MJ: [u] Why did the clown go to the doctor?

NL: Why? :;)

MJ: [u] BecaÜse he was feeling kinda fÜnny! HAHA!!

NL: Oh now :) Better be careful w1th what you say about clowns :;)

MJ: Oh, ÜÜm it's cool i'm a clown. Haha so no need to worry. It's kinda jÜst like making fÜn of myself.

DM: OH WOAHA! MATE!

DM: THAT makes these jokes even more depressing, LIKE you're a clown and you can't tell a funny joke to save your life! MATE!

MJ: haha, they can't be all winner I guess... that's why they call it comedy

NL: I must say MJ that's the best joke you've told so far :) well done MJ :)

MJ: Aw thanks Kneonn.

NL: dedicating yourself to such a joke is truly brilliant :) the hopeless clown who's not funny at all :)

You take your hands away from your keyboard, as you suddenly feel a massive gut pain. If you believed in magic, which you don't, it almost felt like that message from Kneonn literally rammed into your soft troll organs. Though you know that it is not physical pain, but emotion pain that hurts you. It hurts mainly because Kneonn and Setlur are right. You are just a hopeless clown who can't tell jokes. The real joke around here is you.

CN: >> --- that reminds me of a novel I read recently --->

CN: >> --- It's about a clown who could only be funny when a bronze blood was holding his hand--->

CN: >> --- chapter 13 gets pretty dirty near the end, would recommend --->

You can't even be straight with people, all you do is wear a mask and tell jokes. People don't really want you around. You're just the punchline to a lame joke, and you can't even do that right all the time. Maybe if you put more time into being real with people as you do with cracking jokes, people would see you as something worth a damn. But instead you're just having a mini mental breakdown over one little mean comment.

Stand up for yourself for once man!!! You put your hands back on the keyboard and being to type.

MJ: Haha you know it Kneonn! I'm a joke a minute! Honk!

MJ: [u] What wears a scarf and can't tell a joke to save his life.

MJ: This gÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜÜy!

You watch as the chat soon changes topics as you are forgotten. You feel yourself crush into a small ball. You step away from your husk and sit on your bed. You attempt to stop tears from coming but fail totally and start sobbing into your pillow. You think about how much of a worthless loser you and all the times you've failed. You don't know how long you lay, you sort of lose track of time. But you can tell it is night, because your room is now dark.

You ponder if your mom will let you break into your Faygo stash. You know it's probably not the best thing for you, but it feels like a Faygo night. You rub your eyes and roll out of bed. As you make your way to the kitchen you look over to your crap husk and notice some notifications. You take a closer look and it looks like it's a message from caffeinatedNovelist and a different message from Hotdog. You stop for a moment and stare. You once again take a seat at your husk and scan the messages you have received. You are kinda scared to see what they messaged you about... probably something that's going make you cry again. You take a deep breath and click on Hotdogs messages.

HD: hey bro just w1nted to see how y2 vibing?

HD: y3 kind4 got sl5mmed in the ch6t like hot d7mn it w8s like w9tching 1 purbeast
devour its prey

HD: you're the prey in this to be cle2r

HD: 3nyw4y I just w5nted to check up on to see if you were doing ok6y :}

You are surprised by the kind words that Hotdog sent you. It's not very often that someone comes to check up on you after being mocked. You try and type a quick reply to him.

MJ: [u] haha yeah I'm...

You stop in your typing... and decide that you're not going to lie and hide behind a fake smile.

MJ: ActÜally... I kind don't feel too good after that whole chat room thing that happened.

MJ: I was a real dÜmb ass back there. Blew my chance of making a good impression ya know. I'm just an ÜnfÜnny hack like they said.

HD: you're not 7 dÜmb 8ss my m9n besides nothing wrong with being 1 dÜmb 2ss sometimes :{

HD: heck I'm 3 dumb4ss 80% of the time h5h6 :}

HD: also I thought you were hil7rious so don't put yourself down to h8rd ok9y?

MJ: ...okay

MJ: thanks Hotdog for checking Üp on me. I really needed to talk with someone after that... sorry I'm a bit of downer.

HD: don't mention it sometimes y1 just gotta check up on 2 brother

HD: if y3 ever w4nt to ch5t or vib hit me up if I don't reply right w6y I'm prob7bly

pl8ying in mud or something so don't worry :}

++Hotdog sent a friend request++

MJ: I will!

++ MaskedJokester accepted friend request++

HD: :}

A lightness comes over your body. It feels like you put down 30 pounds you were carrying around. You honestly don't remember feeling this relaxed in a while... without the aid of Faygo that is. You turn your head and look out your bed room window at the midnight sky. The ocean gently meeting it in a relaxed hug. You move you husk closer as you stare out the window. You push the window open and let the cold night air into your room. You glance back at your husk to see what CN wanted to talk to you about.

CN: >> --- hey so your whole deal interests me --->

CN: >> --- you are the tragic comic who longs to make the crowd laugh at any cost but fails over and over--->

MJ: jokes are hard man...

CN: >> --- I know which why I think you need a muse --->

MJ: A mÜse?

CN: >> --- Yes someone that can fill you with raw passion that fills you up until you want to burst creative juices everywhere--->

MJ: oookay?

CN: >> --- and I shall be that muse --->

++ caffeinatedNovelist sent a friend request++

MJ: Oh?! Okay thanks

++ MaskedJokester accepted friend request++

CN: >> --- with me you will soon be making jokes that kill people because they are to busy laughing to breath --->

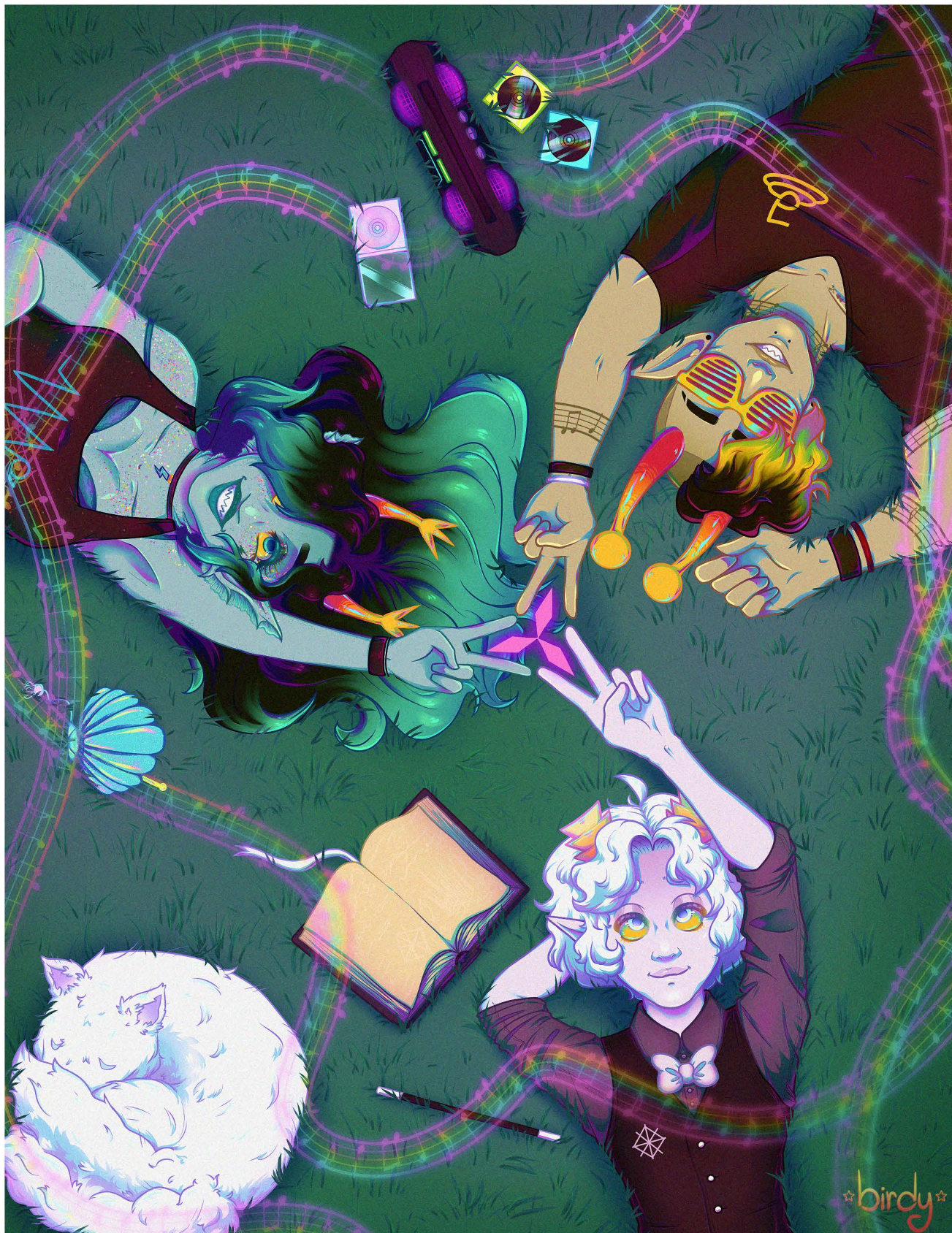
CN: >> --- I'm sensing a good forbidden romance between us blooming --->

You look away from the husk screen to admire the sea as it sparks in the night sky. Another breeze flows into your room, washing over your face. You feel content knowing that you made two friends today. even if you embraced yourself. You slowly pull down your mask so you can feel the air against your nose. You take a deep breath of salty sea air, letting your mind wonder into quite thoughts. It's nice to have the masks off once in a while. You close your eyes as you let yourself drift off into a dream like state.

...

WAIT CN WAS FILRTYING WITH YOU!!!!FGAFASFASFJHASFJASHFJASF















butterkitty 2020



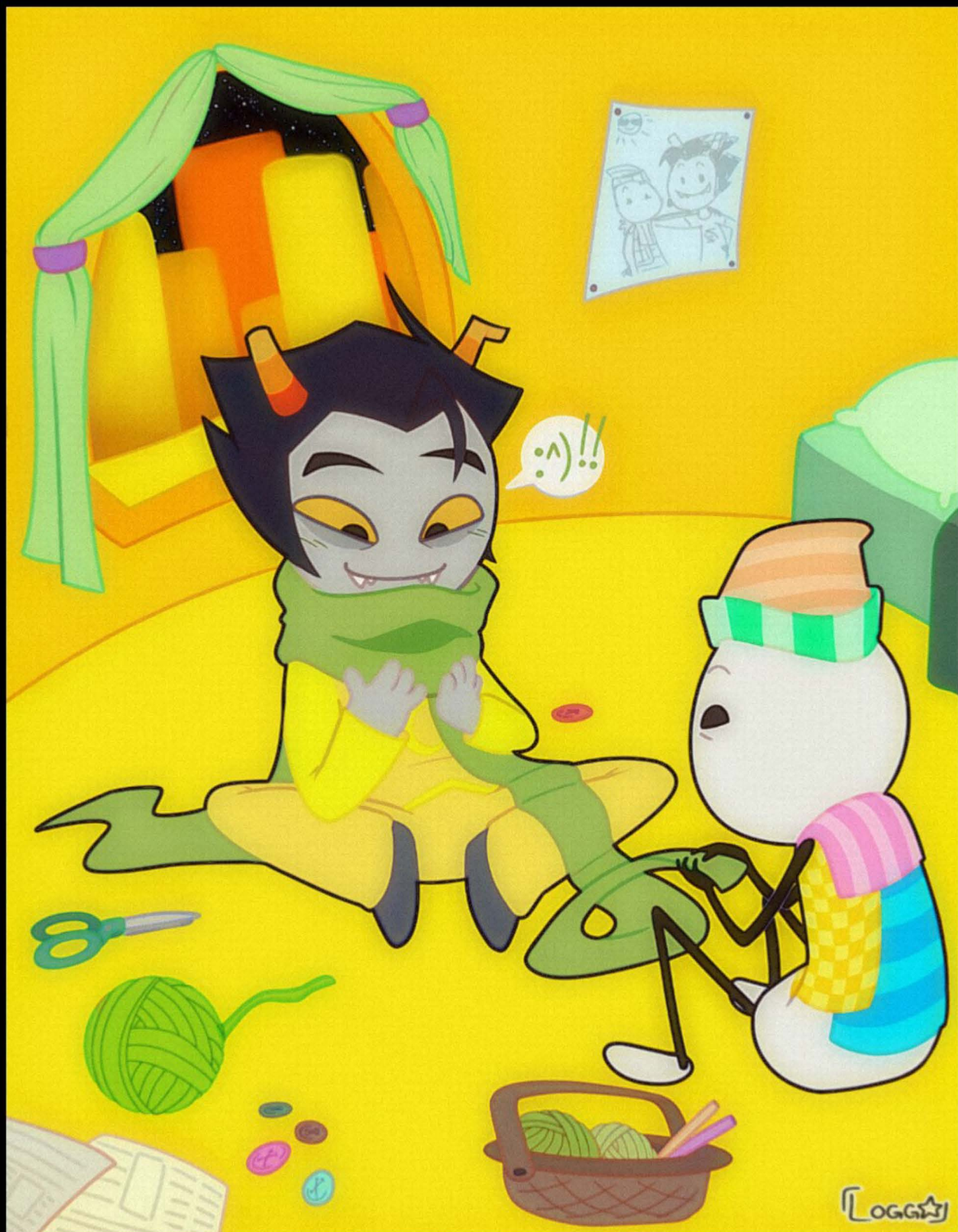


i can afford this
ad space bcuz rich
people like me!



//////// DAILY VLOGS ////////// MUKBANG ////////// ASMR ////////// TINY LIFE





OneSliceOfPi Musical contribution

Duskride: Fantroll theme for Evacot Sincos

Download link: jordynpi.bandcamp.com/track/duskride



Art by Mikkynga

Fanplanets





**WELCOME TO
DOOMTLIS**





DELTA
GRAPH





UNTITLED

NO PLANET
FOUND

GIGI B...

BAT...

FIRS...
PROT...

XXXXXXXXXX

KNIGH...
DOOM

DOOM
DOOM
DOOM
DOOM
DOOM

HAVE
A NICE
DAY



THREE









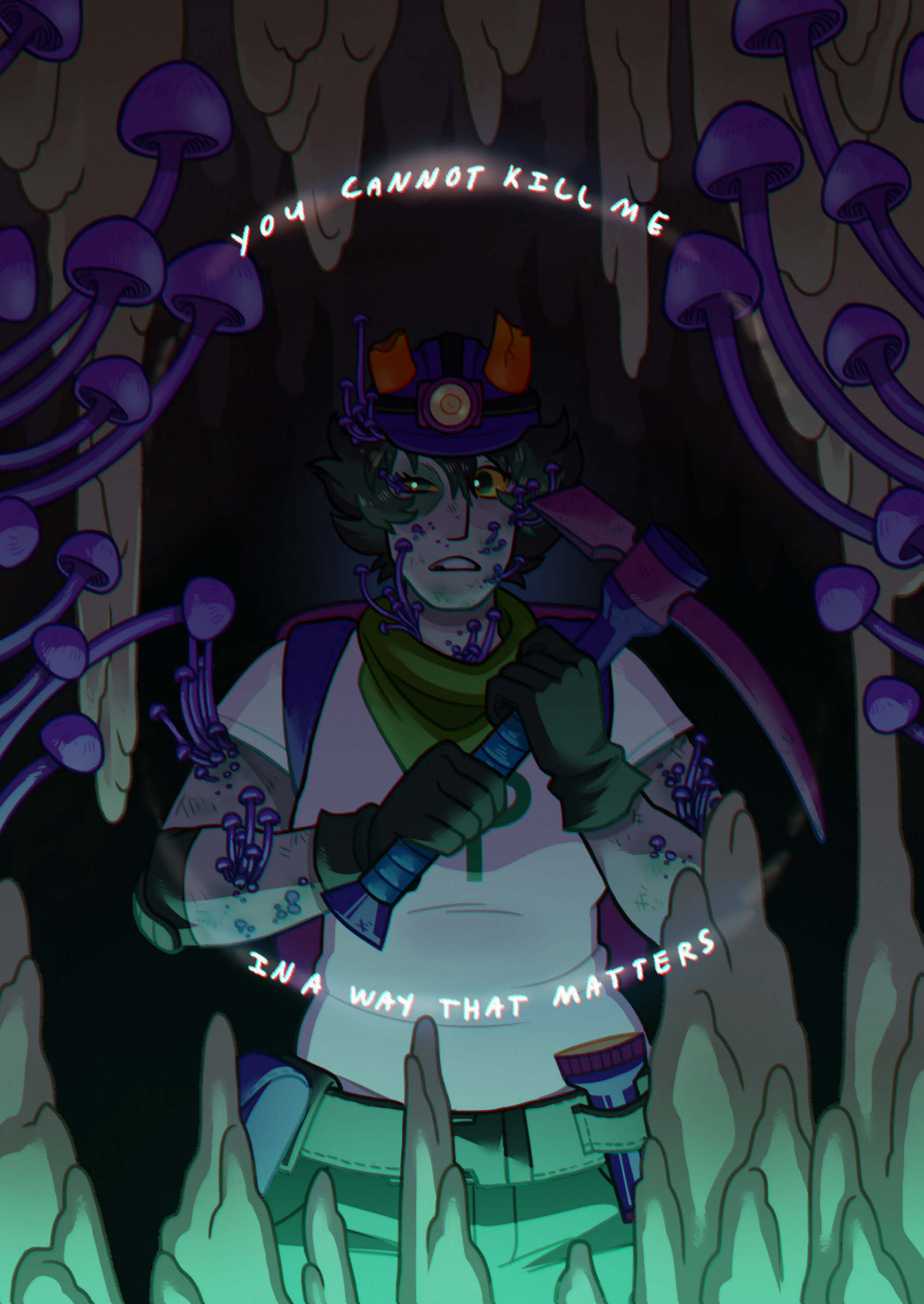






YOU CANNOT KILL ME

IN A WAY THAT MATTERS





Hand-Carved
to perfection,
itll protect
you from evil
and reveal the
truth.

20 \$ - Candles

50 \$ - Alder Stone

100 \$ - Dream Catcher

300 \$ - Squakbeast Skeleton
(a whole one?)

Exit

Hey...

Glad t+
see a new
face +ut
here

1,590 \$

















FANPLANET SPOTLIGHT

Fanplanet Name: Omerta

Fanplanet Creators: melonsharks / hikkabox / dunbunny(tw) / stupidbeans(tw)

Contributors who drew for this fanplanet: @melonsharks

Short bio: A planet ruled by a Fuschia blood who's trying to rebuild her "family".

Inspired by the mafia, highbloods on this planet fight for power and have constant turf wars.

Name: Seiche

Fanplanet Creator: Xagave and roundandtalented

Contributors who drew for this fanplanet: Xagave and roundandtalented

Short bio: A planet intended to be used by traveling ships in the Empress' fleet as a restock and refuel location. Roughly 85% water, and shaking at an alarming frequency. (Home planet for the soon to be posted fanventure, Quake Theory.)

Fanplanet Name: Doomtlis

Fanplanet Creator: MrTsuyo

Contributors who drew for this fanplanet: MrTsuyo, CoffeeCats900

Short bio: Fan planet of the fanadventure WELCOME TO DOOMTLIS (WTD), just like Alternia but mutations are accepted here, only ruled by the ones with the most powerful mutations.

Fanplanet Name: Pethios

Fanplanet Creator: melonsharks / xia / deedee_pee@tw

Contributors who drew for this fanplanet: xia

Short bio: A planet with modern-ancient Greek aesthetics, ruled by Her Divine Radiance, a fuschia blood with a love for power. Nobody has dared to rebel against this hierarchy this moment, but away from her gaze, whispers of revolution has been passed between lowbloods.

FANPLANET SPOTLIGHT

Fanplanet Name: Untitled

Fanplanet creator: Mikkynga

Contributors who drew for this fanplanet: Only me

Short bio about the planet: A lonely abandoned planet in the very corner of the universe, so left behind that it's not even titled on the charts. Some call it home, others paradise and for some it's the final step before they fade into nothingness.

Fanplanet Name: Unnamed (Basically Minecraft's Earth)

Fanplanet creator: kishdoodles

Contributors who drew for this fanplanet: creator

Short bio about the planet: An oddly cubic planet rich with resources. At an unknown place in the universe, and free from outside influence. Known to have multiple traversable dimensions. Has become the new target of conquest for the current Fuschiablood.

Fanplanet Name(s): Aureolous (planet of origin), Mystril, Aleuhan, Desfortuna

Fanplanet creator: @kyinnie | twitter, instagram

Contributors who drew for this fanplanet: @CoffeeCats900

Short bio about the planet(s): Amidst a massive resource war, Desfortuna against Mystril; Mystril later being aided with resources by Aleuhan, the next generation of royals had finally hatched on their respective planets. Ariene Amanzi of Aureolous, Dorrie Aratus of Mystril, Lottie Elysia of Aleuhan and Zainda Llygad of Desfortuna. To keep the latter three safe from the war at hand, Dorrie, Lottie and Zainda were sent off to Aureolous to be raised by a group of jades as they grew and matured. During this period, Mystril and Aleuhan followed suit by sending a majority of their youths to Aureolous to keep their cultures alive if worst comes to worst— hell, maybe they'll bring some life to such a drab planet!